A YOUNG HARDESTY NOVELETTE by H.H. KNIBBS

15¢

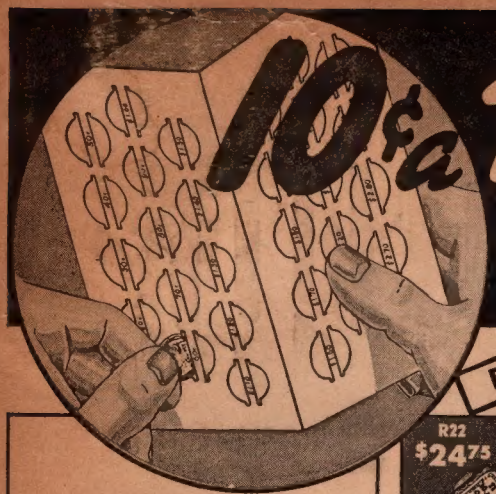
Adventure

A POPULAR PUBLICATION

JAN.

IT HAPPENED TO BE CATS
A STORY OF THE SOUTH SEAS BY
DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

GEORGES SURDEZ THE LEGION IN SYRIA
VICTOR SHAW POLAR EXPLORATION



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Yes—only 10c a day on my SAVINGS BOOK PLAN will buy your choice of these nationally known watches. It's simple—here's how you go about it...

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Send coupon below with a dollar bill and a brief note telling me who you are, your occupation, and a few other facts about yourself. Indicate the watch you want on coupon, giving number and price.

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If satisfied, you pay 10 monthly payments. If you are not satisfied after wearing the watch for ten days, send it back and I'll return your dollar on our

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A Savings Book will be sent to you to help you save your dime each day. YOU PAY MONTHLY by money order or check. Try this easy, convenient method that has helped thousands to own fine watches without burden on the pocket book or savings.

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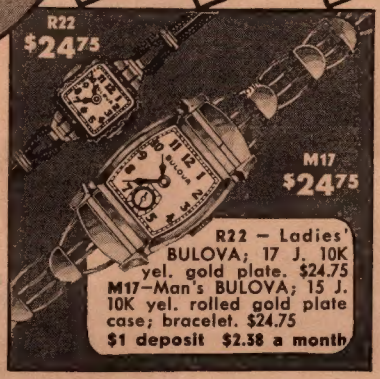

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S141 — Man's ELGIN—sturdy 10K yellow gold filled case; 17 jewels. $37.50
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P143 — Ladies' tiny KENT. 7 jewels. Guaranteed. $15.95
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T67 — Ladies' GRUEN. 15 J. 10K yel. rolled gold plate. $29.75
O68 — Man's GRUEN Verithin: 15 jewels; 10K yellow rolled gold plate. $29.75
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K273 — Service Watch — new radium dial, easy-to-see. 7 Jewels, sturdy 10K yellow rolled gold plate case. Made especially for Army and Navy men.
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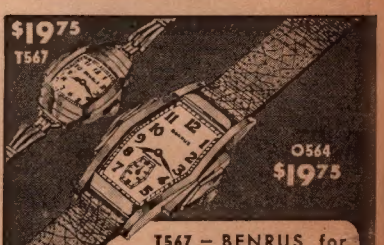

O564 $19.75

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L. W. Sweet—Dept. 12-A, 1670 Broadway
New York, N. Y.

Enclosed find $1 deposit. Send me Watch No. _____ Price $_____. I agree to wear the watch for 10 days. If not satisfied, I'll return it and you will refund my dollar. If I keep it, I'll pay balance (PLUS FEDERAL TAX) in 10 equal monthly payments.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

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Men Anxious To Make $30 $40 $50 a Week

RADIO TECHNICIANS HOLD GOOD JOBS in more than 800 Broadcasting stations in the U. S. with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Aviation, Police, Commercial Radio are other fields which employs Radio Technicians and Operators. I give you the Radio training you need for jobs like these, and train you to be ready when Television opens new jobs in the future. Get the facts. Mail the Coupon.

Busy Radio Industry Increasing Demand For Radio Operators and Technicians

LEARNING RADIO AT HOME NIGHTS THIS WAY HAS LANDED GOOD JOBS FOR HUNDREDS

Here is a quick way to more pay. Radio offers beginners a chance to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now, and to train for opportunities paying up to $30, $40, $50 a week for full-time Radio Technicians and Operators. On top of record business, the Radio industry is getting millions of dollars worth of vital defense orders. Many Radio Technicians and Operators have entered military service, opening many opportunities for men with Radio training. Clip the coupon below and mail it. Find out how I have trained men from 16 to 50 years old to make more money in Radio—how I will train you, too, for Radio's opportunities.

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Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!

REPAIRING, SERVICING, SELLING home and Auto Radio sets (there are more than 50,000,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Public Address Systems are another source of profit for Radio Technicians. Many Radio Technicians operate their own spare time or full time Radio business. Mail the Coupon.

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Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable practical experience. You also get my modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

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It tells about my Course: the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows letters from more than 100 men I trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. Mail the Coupon in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President,
Dept. 2AS9
National Radio Institute,
Washington, D. C.

N. R. I. Trained These Men at Home

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator.—Hollis F. Hayes, 327 Madison St., Lapeer, Mich.

Now Chief Radio Engineer

I am now Chief Radio Engineer at Kankakee Ordnance Works and very pleased with my new position. If I had taken the N.R.I. Course I might be digging ditches or perhaps unemployed.—R. S. Lewis, 410 Whitney St., Joliet, Ill.

$40 a Month Extra in Spare Time

I do Radio Service work in my spare time only, operating from my home and I net about $40 a month. I was able to start servicing Radios 3 months after enrolling with N. R. I.—Wm. J. Chermak, R. No. 1, Box 287, Hopkins, Minn.

Had Own Business 6 Mos. After Enrolling

I went into business for myself 6 months after enrolling. In my Radio repair shop I do about $300 worth of business a month. I can't tell you how valuable your Course has been to me.—A. J. Baten, Box 1168, Gladewater, Texas.

FREE TO MEN WHO WANT BETTER JOBS

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2AS9
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Age.....

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

3-18-ADVENTURE

FEBRUARY ISSUE ON SALE JANUARY 9TH

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 106. No. 3 for January, 1942 Best of New Stories

The Guns of the *Keokuk* (a ballad) . . HELEN von KOLNITZ HYER 11
She sank in a slough where the tide ripped through, so they left her guns inside,
Sealed fast in the turret tops where half her crew had died.

Six Frames the Gang (a novelette) . . . HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS 15
Young Joe Hardesty, Arizona-bound aboard the Limited, gazed happily at the desert rolling past. "I'll be back with Bedrock at the Mebbyso Mine before I know it," he mused and turned to watch his plump bespectacled companion in the smoking compartment. "Nice little tenderfoot," thought Joe. Then the gunfire sounded up ahead and he knew he was at least 100% wrong on both counts.

Maine Man . . . . . BURROUGHS MITCHELL 41
You couldn't ask for a better guide in the woods than Jeb. The only thing he couldn't find was himself. Luckily Captain Carleton, U.S.N., knew just the man to help him.

Luck of the Legion . . . . . GEORGES SURDEZ 45
War is the Legion's business and it works at it in ways not always orthodox. Which explains, perhaps, why Pinson offered to switch uniforms to save the life of the man who had just shot him.

Viva China! (conclusion) . . . . . JAMES NORMAN 48
In which a generalissimo's teeth are lost and found, a British journalist sallies forth to battle clad only in a bathtowel, a Japanese colonel becomes inextricably tangled in several yards of his own gold braid, a rat nips a tiger's tail and G.H.Q. cheats a Scots doctor out of his chance to dissect the largest liver in all China.

It Happened to Be Cats . . . . . DONALD BARR CHIDSEY 92
On Phoenix it was rabbits—on Juan Fernandez goats—on Monckton cats. And two men—for a short while. Then there was only one.

With No Acclaim (a fact story) . . . . . VICTOR SHAW 101
1898—and into the teeth of a Greenland blizzard mushed two fur-muffled human atoms, Matthew Hensen and Robert Peary. Had the latter's companion been any other man, the chances are he would never have stood at Ninety North that world famous 8th of April ten years later.

The Camp-fire . . . . . Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 114
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Cover by Albin Henning.
Illustrations by I. B. Hazelton, Hamilton Greene and Robert Kuhn
Kenneth S. White, Editor

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Who gives a hoot about YOU?

▶ Who cares whether you ever amount to anything, or end up in the county poorhouse?

YOU do! . . . You, and your family, and a few good friends.

And nobody else! . . . Except the taxpayers who support the poorhouse.

What about it?

Just this, mister: If you're ever going to get ahead in the world, and get your share of the things that go with personal success, *you've* got to do something about it! Nobody is going to say to you, "Sir, here's a good job, with a good salary. Please take it!" But —

If you become a *trained man* — an *expert* in some line of work — then, almost certainly, some one will say to you, "Here's a good job, at good pay. I need a *trained man* to handle it. You've got the training—*you're the man!*"

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Here's the coupon *they* mailed. But it's up to YOU!

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★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X: ★

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- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
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- ☐ Public Works Engineering
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- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
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City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

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British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

A COMMISSION in the Naval Reserve.

Request:—I have a Chief Mate's license, on any ocean, but it has not been renewed. Can I get an officer's commission in the Naval Reserve?

—W. H. Gleason,
Norfolk, Va.

Reply by Lieut. Durand Kiefer, U.S.N. (Retired):—If you have a Chief Mate's license, and it has not been expired too long, you should have no great difficulty getting a commission in the Merchant Marine Naval Reserve, probably without further examination, providing, of course, that you are an American citizen.

Your best course is to take your license to the Naval Operating Base there at Norfolk and inform the sentry at the gate that you want to contact the office of the Commandant, Fifth Naval District, at the Base, regarding a Naval Reserve commission. You will be directed to the proper officer at Fifth Naval District Headquarters where your application for a commission in the Merchant Marine Naval Reserve will be given prompt attention and the necessary formalities explained.

Your rank in the Merchant Marine Naval Reserve will depend upon your age, experience, total sea duty, and such considerations. I am sure that if you have had any considerable experience as a merchant marine officer the Navy will be not only willing but anxious to issue you a commission and send you to sea on active duty in one of the many new naval auxiliaries at a very respectable salary.

INDIAN carpenters had an excellent tool in the draw knife.

Request:—I would like some information about an Indian crooked knife. As near as I can make out from written descriptions it is a kind of one-handed draw knife, with the blade bent at the tip, used by the Indians of the wooded areas of North America. I want to make one.

—Kevin Mitchell,
1408 N. 47th St.
Seattle, Wash.

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—Your description of the crooked knife of the Indians as a one-handed draw knife is a very apt one, for it is always used by drawing toward one, instead of cutting away from the body, as with all other knives. Too, the crooked knife is flat on the outside and beveled on the inside only, as is a drawing knife.

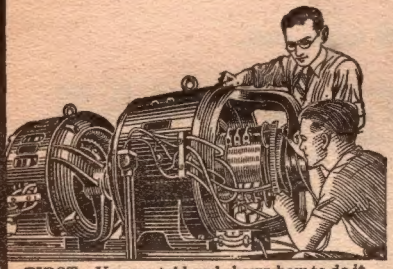
At some machine shop get a discarded machine hacksaw blade, draw the temper from it, grind off the teeth and bevel one edge, then cut off a section about eight inches long. Shape three inches of one end for a tang to fit in the handle, then bend up one inch of the other end into a quarter circle, being sure that the flat side of the blade is outside and that the bevel is on the inside of the curve. There is no point, the end of the blade remaining square. Retemper and hone to a keen edge.

Make a wooden, bone or plastic handle big enough to fit the hand comfortably and set the tang firmly in it, riveting through previously bored holes. The knife is used by holding in the right hand, with the knuckles down, and whittling toward you. The curve of the blade is suited for carving out depressed areas, more than any other type of knife. You will find it a little awkward at first, but soon you will be swearing by it as the most useful woodworking tool in your

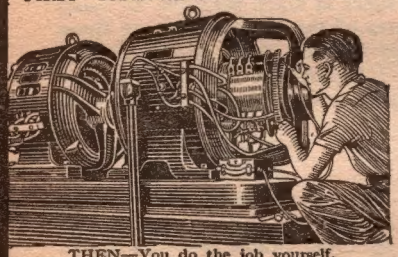
(Continued on page 8)

TRAIN THIS QUICK EASIER WAY FOR ELECTRICITY

12 Weeks *Practical* WORK IN MY CHICAGO SHOPS



FIRST—You are told and shown how to do it.



THEN—You do the job yourself.

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Have you ever dreamed of holding down a **steady, good pay job?** Have you ever dreamed of doing the work you really like in a job that holds promise of a **real future** in the years ahead?

Well, we all know that you can't get the good things in life by just **dreaming** about them. Hundreds of fellows are today holding down mighty fine jobs with prospects of a bright future. They are filling these jobs because they had the foresight to equip themselves with the **right kind of training.** Most of these men were only average fellows a short time ago, but the proper training helped to lift them out of the low pay ranks of unskilled workers. The same opportunity is now offered to **you.**

The great fascinating field of **ELECTRICITY** offers a real future to many men and young men who are willing to prepare for a place in this giant industry.

AN EXTRA 4 WEEKS COURSE IN RADIO INCLUDED

Here at my school in Chicago, the **world's Electric Center,** you can get **12 weeks Shop Training** in **ELECTRICITY,** then I'll include **an extra 4 weeks Course in Radio** that can help give you your start towards a better job.

You will be trained on actual equipment and machinery and because of our method of training, you **don't need previous experience or advanced education.**

Here in my school you work on generators, motors, dynamos, you do house wiring, wind armatures and do actual work in many other branches of electricity and right now I'm including valuable instruction in **Diesel electricity, Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning** at **no** extra tuition cost. Our practical shop methods make it **easier to learn—First** the instructors **tell** you **how** a thing should be done, **then** they **show** you how it should be done—**then you do the actual work yourself.**

I'll Finance Your Training

You can get this training **first—then pay for it later in easy monthly payments,** starting **60 days** after your 12 weeks training period is over—**then you have 12 months** to complete your payments.

Send the coupon today for all details. When I get it I'll send you my big free book containing dozens of pictures of students at work in my shops. I'll also tell you about my **"Pay After Graduation" plan,** how many **earn while learning** and how we help our students **after graduation.** Fill in, clip coupon, **mail today for your start toward a brighter future.**

SEND FOR FREE BOOK

The Coyne Electrical School is 40 years old. Many hundreds of young men have become successful through Coyne training. My free book tells you how you, too, can get a training that will give you your start to a better job and a real future.

H. C. LEWIS, President

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL

500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 12-76, Chicago, Illinois

H. C. LEWIS, President, Coyne Electrical School, 500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 12-76, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir: Please send me free your big catalog and full particulars of your **Extra 4 Weeks Radio Course,** also your **"Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation"** Plan and all other features.

Name.....

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City.....State.....

Mail in envelope or paste on postcard

(Continued from page 6)

kit. A little thought will show you that the same blade cannot be used by both a right and a left handed person, so plan yours to fit the circumstances.

BLACK widows for pets!

Request:—I would like some information about Black Widow spiders. Recently I caught two of these spiders, one full grown and one about one third grown. The small spider has a red stripe on the back as well as the hour glass on the underside. One nest has hatched and there are about one hundred small spiders some of which are growing and seem to feed on about fifty per cent of the small spiders that have grown but very little since they were hatched.

I have been feeding the spiders bugs and small grasshoppers, but as these are about through here I am wondering what to feed them this winter if they live.

Are the small spiders poisonous at the time of hatching?

—James W. Redding,
Box 442
Rifle, Colorado.

Reply by S. W. Frost:—Black widow spiders hatching in July or August usually pass the winter in the immature stage and naturally do no feeding during the winter. They will go into hibernation unless the room where they are kept is too warm.

There are a number of interesting papers dealing with the black widow. The most complete is perhaps Bulletin 591 of the University of California, Berkeley, California. This is written by W. B. Herms, S. F. Bailey and Barbara McIvor. You probably could get considerable information from this bulletin.

The amount of poison in the glands of the young spiders is probably too small to cause any discomfort. Even the full grown spiders are not as serious as they are sometimes reported.

YOU either get what you want or take what you get in the Army.

Request:—Will you please give a list of the different departments or divisions of the Army.

Can you join any division that you want to? Are the qualifications the same.

—Bernard Hagen,
Route 1, Box 34,
Centreville, Michigan

Reply by Fairfax Downey:—The Army is divided into Arms and Services.

The Arms: Infantry, Cavalry, Field Artillery, Coast Artillery, Air Corps, Corps of Engineers, Signal Corps, the Armored Force.

The Services: Adjutant General's Department, Inspector General's Dept., Judge Advocate General's Dept., Quartermaster Corps, Finance Dept., Medical Dept., Ordnance Dept., Chemical Warfare Service, Corps of Chaplains.

Qualifications are the same. If you volunteer (3-year enlistment), you can apply for any branch you wish and will be placed there if there is a vacancy. If drafted, you may express a preference but can't count on getting it.

ISLANDS down east.

Request:—I am interested in the islands of Maine and would like to know how the climate differs from the mainland, the kind of soil, the different kinds of trees, etc. Are there any minerals on them like those at Paris, Maine? Would you describe a few of the more interesting islands? I would like to know if there is much seaweed, as along other parts of the coast. Also are there any sandy bathing coves on the smaller islands? I would also like to know the approximate cost of an island of 25 to 50 acres.

—Thomas C. Glynn,
50 Jamaicaway,
Jamaica Plain, Mass.

Reply by Chief Stanwood:—As Maine has over 6,000 islands along its coast it would be hard to go into detail on "average" characteristics. These islands have a lot of fog during the year, the average temperature is around 60 degrees for the year. With the exceptions of fog and coolness they are about the same as the main-land. About all kinds of trees are found with spruce the leading tree. Islands that had much on it are pretty well cut off now for pulpwood. No minerals that amount to anything are found on any that I know of. The rocks are the usual slate formation. Flint island, down off Washington County, is where the Indians went for their flint hundreds of years ago, a few have ponds on them, some have brooks, many have cliffs, others have sand beaches, but the average are rocky shores and landing on others is some job at times when the sea is rough. Price on an island would run from a few hundred up. Sea weed is coming back after disappearing for some years.

Don't Look Now!

but if you want to see a real

HE-MAN BODY...

WHAT do people say about YOU when they see you on the beach? When you're stripped to the waist you show what you REALLY are—a HE-MAN or a weakling! Do the girl's eyes just give you the silent "ha-ha"? Or can you FEEL their admiring glances as you strut along?

And don't think that clothes can cover up a flat chest, skinny arms, and pipe-stem legs EITHER! People KNOW at a glance when a man's got a puny build like Caspar Milquetoast—or when his whole personality glows with smashing strength, rippling muscles, tireless pep and energy! You CAN'T down a fellow like that—he's BOUND to be popular and the life of the party wherever he goes! Do YOU want to be that kind of a man? Then listen to THIS—

Posed by one of Charles Atlas's pupils

In Just 15 Minutes a Day, I'll Prove I Can Make YOU a New Man Too!

Charles Atlas

That's what I said—15 minutes a day! That's all the time I need to PROVE—regardless of how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be—that I can give you the kind of body that men envy and women admire. Biceps that can dish it out and a muscle-ridged stomach that can take it. A full, deep barrel-chest. Legs that never tire. A tough, sinewy back that you can put a mountain on. And a general all-around physique that can laugh at fatigue and ANY kind of rough going.

Today, a mighty wave of FITNESS is surging over America! What about YOU? Suppose YOU are called to the colors! Will your body be the laughing-stock of the company—or the kind of big-muscled physique that will command the envy of all your buddies? Suppose YOU are called for home defense! Have you the he-man strength and tireless energy that double-shifts of working and watching may call for?

Why RIGHT NOW many soldiers and sailors in active service are using my methods. They know that a MAN'S body means "easier going," more fun and quicker promotion!

Would You Believe I Was Once A 97-lb. Weakling?

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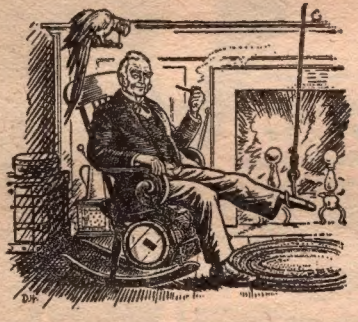

BACK HOME ON SHORE, those canny captains continued to "rock the keg" — beneath pine rockers. And from these famous "rocked" whiskeys comes our inspiration for Rocking Chair, with its almost-forgotten taste and richness!

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85 Proof • 75% Grain Neutral Spirits • Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.

THE GUNS OF THE KEOKUK

A BALLAD

By HELEN VON KOLNITZ HYER

DECORATIONS BY I. B. HAZELTON

Fort Sumter crouched on her wave-lapped sand and her seaward guns spat red;
And Moultrie's snub-nosed mortars roared their challenge overhead.

Pale and fair as a jewelled bride, the town of Charleston lay,
While a hundred bell-toned hounds of war gave tongue outside her bay.

Sleek and strong was that ruthless pack, sinewed with steel and steam;
But Sumter's wall flung back their call like the echoes in a dream.

Two islands edged the harbor bar where the white-capped waves shone blue;
Like a sentinel at the gates of hell, Fort Sumter cleaved the two.

She held command on a spit of sand where the channel slithered deep,
With Morris Island at her back and her shoals like white-fleeced sheep.

Across the channel's mile-wide throat, she had stretched a crescent moon,
With one horn set on her parapet and one on Moultrie's dune.

A crescent moon of bobbing kegs, like floats on a giant's seine,
A mute and menacing barrier whose silent threat was plain.

East by south at the harbor's mouth the Federal fleet swept in,
While the seagulls shrilled and the air was filled with the broadside's thunderous din.

The Yankee plan when the fight began was to ride the flood tide's crown,
Circle the fort with their largest ships—and sleep that night in town!

With bursting pride on a swollen tide they charged in double lines;
But they had not recked that they might be checked by a boom of floating mines!

Fort Sumter's guns were old and worn, of every shape and size,
But the men who aimed them had the glint of marksmen in their eyes.

Hunters all, at the battle call, they served their guns with ease,
And dropped their kill with a sportsman's skill like squirrels from tall pine trees.

The air was hot with screaming shot; the ships were bucking steeds;
Their plunging masts in the grapeshot blasts blew off like tumble-weeds.

The Yankee admiral stamped his deck; his face was dark with gloom;
There was never a sea-dog whelped who'd dare to ram that mine-strung boom.

They swung broadside but their shots went wide as the two forts raked their decks,
Then they tried to snap from the mine-rimmed trap in a froth of bloody wrecks.

On Sumter's ramp in the salty damp, the air was a surcharged fuse,
Where the rusty cannon jammed and choked, or burst and killed their crews.

The gunners tore at the rags they wore and swabbed their guns like mad;
And cursed and prayed for cannon made like the guns the Yankees had.

Then out of the swirling battle fog and the fleet's stampeding ruck,
With the arrogance of a flashing lance, slid the steel-clad *Keokuk.*

This hound of war was a monitor, twin-turreted and neat;
The newest ship and the toughest ship in all the Federal fleet.

She held the weight of her armor plate as a knight would hold his shield,
She ran her course like a swift race horse through the sea's wild clover field.

Fore and aft on this slender craft, a-wink in the noon-day sun,
Each turret wore the mighty bore of a brand-new Dahlgren gun.

The forward turret spun on its base and the forward Dahlgren spoke,
And it split a path through Sumter's wrath as an axe might split an oak.

With a wailing cry like a startled sigh, a score of brave men died;
Then hoarse as a breath of wingèd death, lean Sumter's guns replied.

The grim exchange was at point-blank range—twelve hundred yards apart—
And the crack Confederate gunners pierced the vessel's pulsing heart.

With her turrets slashed and her rudder smashed and a dozen rents in her hull,
The *Keokuk* lay fluttering like a badly wounded gull.

One by one in the setting sun, the ships limped back to sea,
They had done their best but the cobra's nest of Sumter still was free.

Pale and fair as a jewelled queen on a safely guarded throne,
While her church bells rang till the echoes sang, the lights of Charleston shone.

Late that night by the stars' faint light, the beaten admiral raved,
And towed the *Keokuk* to the shoals to see what might be saved.

She sank in a slough where the tide ripped through, so they left her guns inside,
Sealed fast in the turret tops where half her crew had died.

Three times they tried to blow her up but they could not pierce her crust,
So they left her there by a rocket's flare to the surf, the sharks—and rust.

The stunned sea-hounds bound up their wounds and smarted with defeat,
While Sumter's host drank a victory toast though their cup was bitter-sweet.

The fleet closed in. Since it could not win past Sumter's brick redoubt,
It straightway laid a tight blockade to starve the city out.

Day by day in the Yankee way, the stubborn ships patrolled;
Night by night in skirmish fight, the fitful cannon rolled.

The blue-coats swarmed on the islands, stormed the fort when the tide was low;
And Sumter's men sortied again and traded blow for blow.

The mine boom held, though the town was shelled in a desultory way;
Fort Sumter's bark through the clinging dark grew harsher every day.

The men were gaunt from dire want but they did not beg for bread;
They sent their blockade runners out to search for guns, instead.

At each low tide they stood and eyed the *Keokuk's* gray wreck;
And yearned to steal that rusting keel with the Dahlgrens under deck.

For the true report of that single shot which had cleaned the parapet
Was a goading spur and a challenger that the Fort could not forget.

One moonless night when the spray bloomed white past the flagship's drowsy snores,
All silently there put to sea a skiff with muffled oars.

As gray cats crawl on a garden wall and spring on a sleeping mouse,
The gray-clad prowlers climbed and sprang to the *Keokuk's* gun-house.

The greasy slope rebuffed their hope; the turret walls were thick.
And the soldiers knew they must chisel through to win the final trick.

They gazed intent through a gaping rent; their searchlight stabbed like a dart;
The armor plate was set on a grate of beams one foot apart.

But there on its twisted cradle piece the mighty Dahlgren swung,
With a curving crest like a girl's bared breast—and the Sumter men were young!

Their yearning flamed like a thirst untamed that could not be denied;
They longed to hold that steel-sweet mold as a man may yearn for his bride.

The Yankee navy claimed the sea and its guard boats stalked the coasts;
But unafraid, the soldiers made their nightly tryst with ghosts.

Never ask how they did their task—in the dark with muffled tools;
For this was a deed that was born of need—and love that laughed at rules.

Twelve nights they came and they cut the frame where the gun lay deep in its nest;
And mud and tide contrived to hide so the Yankees never guessed.

In a Charleston dock, under key and lock, with utmost secrecy,
Inch by inch they bulit a winch that could lift that cannon free.

The thirteenth night, without sound or light, they towed the winch-boat out
To the *Keokuk*, and they prayed for luck as the loose slings swung about.

All night they toiled as the flood tide boiled and the hungry sharks swam by,
Till the cut roof slid like a box's lid and the gun glared up at the sky.

Then cold with sweat and the lurking threat of chance discovery,
With soaring hopes they lashed the ropes that would lift the Dahlgren free.

The job was tough for the sea was rough and the steamer rocked and plunged.
They shifted gear and ballast here and dodged as the cannon lunged.

The capstan drummed and the greased blocks hummed as the tackle gripped the sling,
And a great sigh ran from man to man when the gun began to swing.

Their backs were bent and their strength near spent when it rose to the turret top;
They had reached to free it joyfully, when the tackle groaned to a stop.

Poised on the edge, as if a wedge had caught and spiked it there,
The great gun clung and gently swung with a hand's breadth still to clear!

And there it stuck, though the soldiers plucked and wrenched at the tangled ropes.
They cursed and wept but the turret kept a death-grip on their hopes.

Never before was a tug-of-war with such a splendid prize;
In berserk rage they fought that cage till dawn streaked up the skies.

"The fleet's a-stir. Abandon her!" they heard their captain call.
They choked in awe as they gazed and saw a wave like an emerald wall.

It tossed their ship like a swirling chip up a cliff of churning sea.
It heaved and struck at the *Keokuk*—and jerked the cannon free!

The east was light when in open sight of the Yankee's scowling horde,
The winch-boat crawled past Sumter's wall with the Dahlgren safe aboard.

A fortnight after, with stealthy laughter, they raised the second gun.
And the Yankee squadron never guessed when the daring steal was done.

They only knew when a landing crew attacked on Sumter's flank,
From Moultrie's cache would leap a flash that would blast the boats from the bank.

No wile or ruse was the slightest use, though the night was demon-black;
When the Dahlgrens spoke the Yankees broke and Sumter drove them back.

Never at all did the proud forts fall; but when Sherman marched to the sea
And Charleston knew the end was in view, they shipped the guns to Lee.

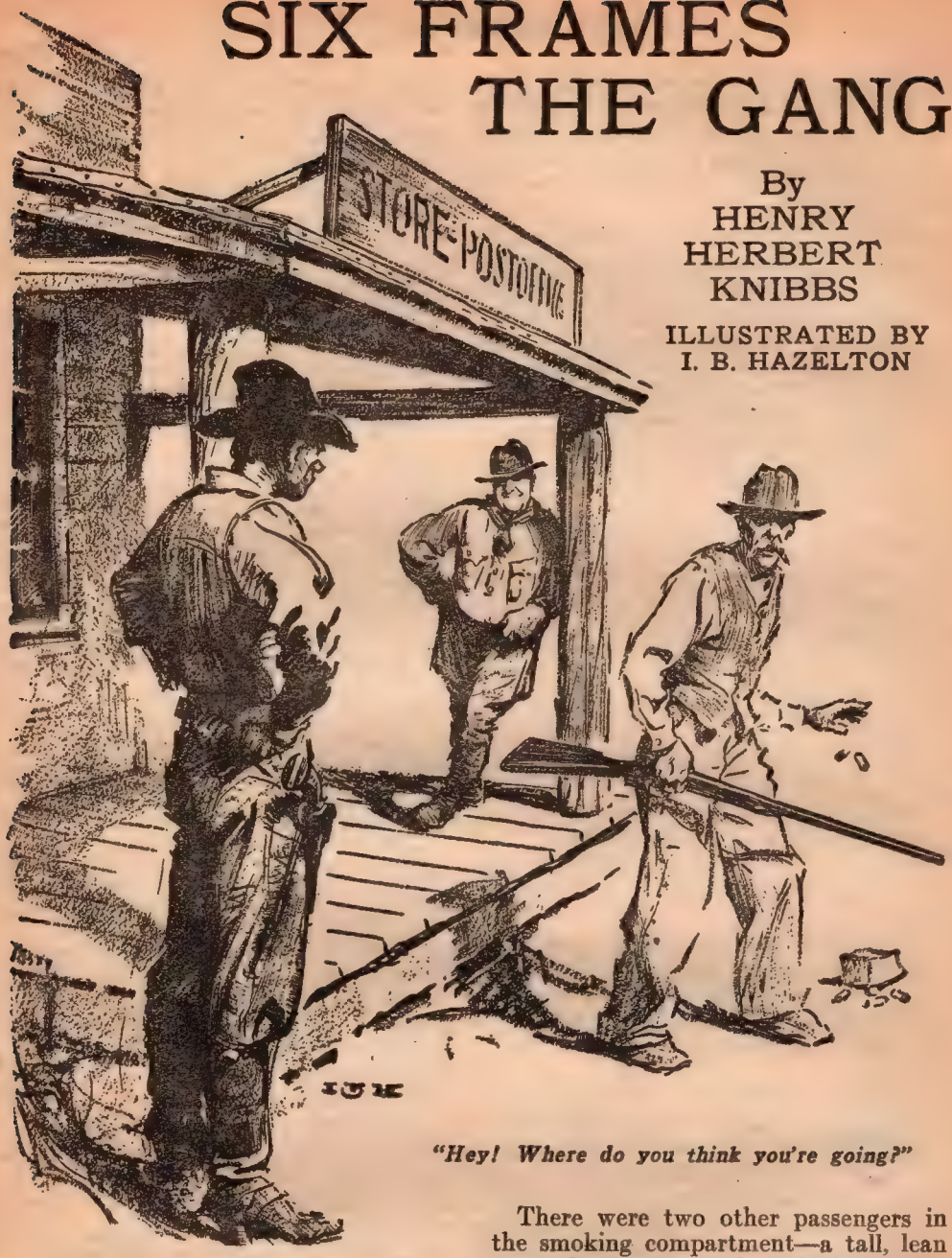
If you should stroll on the high sea wall of Charleston's battery,
You can see a pair of cannon there, as proud as history.

And hear again of Sumter's men—how they held their foes at bay
With a boom of *empty kegs*—and guns that the Yankees threw away!

SIX FRAMES THE GANG

By
HENRY
HERBERT
KNIBBS

ILLUSTRATED BY
I. B. HAZELTON



"Hey! Where do you think you're going?"

JOE HARDESTY gazed approvingly at the wide desert emptiness rolling by. This navigating by train was a tiresome business, Joe thought, but at last he was back in Arizona where a fellow could stretch without poking somebody in the face. In Chicago a fellow hadn't dared take his hands out of his pockets long enough to stretch.

There were two other passengers in the smoking compartment—a tall, lean man whose town clothes didn't go with his weathered face, and a plump little city man in a stylish gray suit. The city man's horn-rimmed glasses gave his eyes a continually surprised look. He had, Joe recollected, boarded the train at Chicago. The tall, lean man had got on at the last stop, Handley Junction. He had no baggage with him.

The Overland Limited was laboring

up the grade that approached the Cut. The tall man rose and peered out of the window. Joe grinned. That hump over his hip pocket might have been a flask. But it wasn't. A flask didn't have a handle.

The engine gave several short, sharp blasts, as if warning someone or something off the track. A sudden tightening of brake shoes sent the tall man lurching across the compartment. The train stopped with a jerk. Recovering his balance, the tall man disappeared through the green curtained doorway.

"Cow on the track," suggested Joe.

"I doubt it," said the little man, rising. "But it might be a horse."

Rapid footsteps sounded in the Pullman corridor, followed by the murmur of voices. From somewhere up ahead came the sharp crackle of gun fire.

Curious as to what was going on, Joe stepped out into the aisle and opened the end door of the car. On the platform of the car ahead stood the tall man in the ill-fitting town clothes. "Get back in there!" he said sharply. He had a gun in his hand.

Through the silence came the contracting *tick tick* of heated metal. As Joe started to back into the car he bumped into the little man in the gray suit.

The little man grabbed Joe's arm and jerked him aside. Joe's head struck the door handle of the porter's storeroom. He heard the rapid stuttering of a gun. Then everything went black.

HE CAME to on the long seat of the smoking compartment. The train was again in motion. The little man in the gray suit was bending over him. "You had a hard fall," he was saying. "Knocked you out. Glad it's nothing more serious."

Gently rubbing the lump above his ear, Joe said, "What was all the shootin'? A hold-up?"

The little man nodded as he sat down beside Joe and coolly began to reload a Luger pistol. Joe stared. "The tall fella with the gun," he said. "Was he in it?"

"Not to any great extent." The little man shoved the Luger into his shoulder holster and adjusted his vest. "His shot went wild. Possibly," added the little man, "because he had three bullets in his solar plexus."

Joe sat up. His conviction that any well-dressed man was necessarily a tenderfoot received a considerable jolt. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said, and let it go at that.

The Overland was now zooming across the flats east of Bowdry. The conductor appeared in the doorway. He nodded to the little man in the gray suit.

They stepped out into the aisle. The murmur of their voices was accompanied by the rhythmic click of rail joints. Presently Joe heard the little man say sharply, "It won't be necessary to report to the sheriff. You have reported to me. I'll take all the responsibility."

Joe was still too dizzy to do much clear thinking. But he was pretty sure that the man who had boarded the train at Handley Junction was in some way connected with the robbery. The little man in the gray suit had killed him. It looked as if the little man must have known that the train was going to be held up. Something queer about that!

The little man came back into the smoking compartment. His manner was brusque. "The conductor tells me you are Joe Hardesty, partner of Old Bedrock of the Mebbyso mine, and that you are getting off at Bowdry. He also intimated that you are a tough kid." The little man smiled. "I like 'em that way. However, as you saw nothing of the actual hold-up you will be free to leave Bowdry any time you wish."

"I figured to do that, anyhow."

"Don't misunderstand me," said the little man. "If there was going to be an inquest, you would appear." There was no antagonism, no challenge in his eyes. But his tone was convincing.

Joe grinned. "I reckon I would. What I mean—if you hadn't taken a hand, mebbe that tall fella woulda got me."

"If you feel that you owe me anything," said the little man, "you can square it by keeping absolutely silent about this business."

"I could do that," said Joe.

"Naturally the passengers have made some wild guesses," continued the little

man. "But they don't know just what happened. Those of the train crew who witnessed the robbery have been instructed to keep their mouths shut."

Wondering who the little city man was, and how he came to have so much authority, Joe said, "Looks like you got it all sewed up to suit yourself."

The little man's tone was friendly. "I haven't even taken the first stitch. But I've got the edges together. And I don't intend to let the local authorities pull them apart."

Evidently the little man referred to Jake Collins, sheriff of Bowdry County. Joe grinned. There was no love lost between Joe and the sheriff.

"Them fellas head north?"

"Yes." The little man hesitated slightly. "But that doesn't mean anything."

The engine whistled for Bowdry. Presently the long train came to a stop.

As Joe stepped down, Sheriff Collins, who was watching the train hands lower a blanketed form from the baggage car, waved his hand. "Hello, Joe. How's tricks?"

"You ought to know," replied Joe.

Folks were crowding toward the baggage car. An acquaintance asked Joe what had happened. Joe shook his head and made for the Chink's restaurant.

AFTER stowing away a hearty supper, he bought a bottle of whiskey, and sauntering down to the Old Bowdry House, took a room for the night. It was a secluded room at the back of the hotel on the second floor. Joe pulled off his boots, moved a chair to the open window, and with the bottle and a glass within easy reach, settled himself to spend a quiet, restful evening.

He poured a generous drink. If you used it right, thought Joe, whiskey was good company. And it might help answer a few questions.

If the little man was a railroad detective, and knew that the train was going to be held up, why hadn't he done something to prevent it?

Joe downed his drink, but it didn't give any answer.

If the little man had been onto the tall man who got on at Handley Junction, why hadn't he stopped him before he had a chance to get out onto the train platform?

No answer to that one, either.

And now that the hold-up had occurred, how come the little man wanted to keep it quiet?

Joe curled a cigarette. It began to look as if the little man, whoever he was, intended to handle the job alone. If so, he might have to whipsaw the badlands, the desert, the Blue Range, Placer Valley, and the Claybank country—more territory than one man could cover in two months. Already the bandits had a good start. If they headed for the border, and kept going, the little man would never catch up with them.

Again Joe reached for the bottle, paused as he heard footsteps on the uncarpeted corridor. Somebody, wearing boots, was trying to move noiselessly. The sound ceased. Joe could hear the rickety doorknob being turned cautiously.

Padding to the door in his stockinged feet, he grasped the knob and jerked the door open.

A stout figure bowled into the room and sprawled on the floor. It was Joe's particular nightmare, Sheriff Collins.

"Damn you, Joe!" spluttered Collins, "What in hell are you trying to do?"

"Same as you—open the door. Only I done it."

Collins got up. Joe lighted the lamp.

Puffing, the sheriff took a proffered chair. Joe sat on the edge of the bed. He had reason to distrust the sheriff, and didn't want any of Collins. But the sheriff, although uninvited, was his guest.

"Not to keep you waitin'," said Joe, "what's bitin' you, special?"

"Saw you'd got back, so I thought I'd drop in. I thought the door was locked."

"Hell, no. Have a drink?"

Sheriff Collins crooked his elbow. His mustache quivered as he blew out a long breath. "Thought mebbe I'd see you around town somewhere."

"When I'm in town," Joe grinned pleasantly, "I always hunt a room before I take my hair down for the night."

"How's Chicago?" the sheriff asked.

"Didn't see a whole lot of it. I was right busy watchin' where I put my feet—same as now."

"See here, Joe," said the sheriff placatingly, "I ain't gunning for any of your friends." Abandoning his sidewinder tactics, the sheriff came to the point. "The Limited," he stated solemnly "was held up at the Cut."

"That's funny. I didn't see you around."

Collins' red face grew redder. "You know damn well what I mean. The gang robbed the express. Also, one of the gang got his."

"Friend of yours?"

Collins bit into his cigar viciously. "See here, Joe. It won't do you no harm to loosen up a little. This is strictly personal and confidential."

"That's just how I feel," declared Joe enthusiastically. "That's why I don't do no talkin' to a peace officer when I got my boots off."

THE sheriff's official oats began to ferment. "I could take you over to the office and make you talk," he belched.

"Why, Jake!" Joe simulated intense surprise. "You ain't treatin' me right. You bust into my room, without a warrant. . . ."

"What I mean," Collins went on in a flat tone, "I tried to pry something out of the conductor, but he froze up tight. And the train crew wouldn't talk. Now only two people got off at Bowdry, you and—"

"If nobody talked," said Joe, "how come you knew the Limited was held up?"

Joe had the sheriff up a tree. He would have enjoyed chasing him out on a limb if a floor board hadn't creaked out in the corridor. Collins went to the door. About to swing it wide, he paused. "Say, wasn't this door shut?"

"Not unless you shut it."

The sheriff's broad, red face took on considerable extra color. He swung round. "You been riding mighty close to the line for quite a spell," he declared. "One of these days you're going to make a mistake for yourself."

"That'll be when I vote for you. Listen, Jake. You come to the wrong tradin' post. Likewise that door ain't locked. It ain't even shut."

Collins glared, stamped out, and banged the door. Joe adjusted the lamp wick and curled a cigarette. Collins, Joe knew, had never been any too keen about taking on a big job, like running down a gang of train robbers, unless public opinion forced him into the saddle. Queer that he was so almighty curious about this particular hold-up. Queerer still that he knew that it had happened.

As Joe sat gazing out of the open window, someone knocked lightly on the door. "Come right in," Joe called out.

On the threshold stood the little man in the gray suit. He had no hat with him, and he wore soft-soled bedroom slippers. "Hope I'm not disturbing you," he said.

"Hell, no. Have a chair."

"My room," said the little man, "is next to yours. Quite convenient." He reached into his pocket and produced five pistol shells. "I was about to return these," he went on, "when I noticed that you were entertaining company."

Joe's puzzled frown was a question.

"Your gun, which you wisely carried in your grip, has been empty since you left Chicago," said the little man. "I emptied it."

Joe said nothing as he took the shells, reloaded his gun and dropped it back into his grip.

"I expected trouble," the little man continued, "and I wasn't altogether sure of you."

Joe gazed significantly at the little man's bedroom slippers.

"Yes," acknowledged the little man, "I heard your talk with Mr. Collins."

"Tryin' to get somethin' on me?"

"Not at all. I was simply checking up on Jake Collins. But I'll admit that I have made some inquiries. I hear that you and the sheriff don't get along any too well. However, I consider that in your favor. I also learned that you have been involved in several shooting scrapes." The little man smiled. "And you're still a pretty healthy specimen."

"If you don't think so," said Joe

quietly, "just go for that Luger under your arm."

"That," said the little man gravely, "will be entirely unnecessary. I came to talk business. If you don't want to listen, say so, and I'll get out. But understand, I'm not leaving with cold feet."

JOE grinned in spite of himself. Perhaps he had been just a little bit uppish. But he didn't intend to back down. "I wasn't bluffin'," he said.

"Neither was I."

It looked like a deadlock. But the little man slipped past it gracefully. "Nothing like a perfect understanding in the beginning. Here's my proposition. If you are footloose for the next few weeks, I can offer you a job. It won't be an easy job. And it will involve considerable personal risk."

"You figurin' to round up them fellas?"

"Every last one of 'em. This is the second time the Limited has been held up in the Cut. Same place and same gang, if I'm not mistaken. I have reason to suspect that Collins knows more about it than he is willing to admit. If he tackled the job, chances are he would come back with one hand empty, and the other full of excuses. He did, the last time."

"Workin' for the government?" said Joe shrewdly.

The little man ignored the question. "The job will pay five dollars a day, and expenses."

Joe and his partner, Bedrock, by dint of hard work, were able to take just about five dollars a day out of the Mebbyso mine. Although pick and shovel work had never appealed to Joe, he had stuck to it, largely because he liked Old Bedrock.

"I've got another man in mind, if you turn it down," said the little man. "Whickerbill Stevens, of the Blue Range. Know him?"

Joe nodded. "Old Whickerbill ain't so fast with a gun. But he's sure a stingin' lizard when he gets started. What I mean—you couldn't take on a better man."

Joe's approval of a possible rival for the job seemed to please the little man. He gestured toward the bottle on the dresser. "Have a drink," he said, as if he were host.

Joe laughed. "I come mighty near forgettin' my manners. Let's have one."

"Make it two, and I'll join you."

This bit of humor is what really turned the balance in the little man's favor. Joe filled the tumbler, which held about three ordinary drinks. But the little man downed the whiskey without a blink.

"I reckon I can get word to Bedrock," said Joe.

The little man set down the glass. "I've been in this country before. But you know it a lot better than I do. That's one reason I thought of hiring you. Another is that you know how to keep your mouth shut."

"Mebbe I could open it long enough to ask you what your name is."

"My name," stated the little man, "is Six."

"And every one of 'em loaded," said Joe. "When do I start workin' for you?"

"In about five minutes." The little man took a wallet from his pocket. "Pick up a couple of good saddle horses and a pack horse. I have my own saddle. We're supposed to be inspecting some state boundaries that have been in question for quite a while. We'll need provisions for at least two weeks, blankets and canteens. I'm leaving all that to you."

Carefully the little man counted out two hundred dollars. "I plan to set out about four in the morning. I'll meet you at the Chink's restaurant." He handed the money to Joe. "I'd like to leave town without attracting any attention," he added. "Good-night."

Short and sweet, thought Joe, stuffing the money into his pocket. It was nine o'clock. The general store would be closed. But the livery would be open. And Kinney always kept a few good horses.

Joe pulled his boots on, picked up his hat, and set out to accumulate the necessary equipment. It still lacked three hours of bedtime.

CHAPTER II

A PECULIAR GAME

DAWN was cautiously exploring the ranges east of Bowdry when the little man, in khaki pants, a gray woolen shirt and a narrow-brimmed Stetson, showed up at the Chink's restaurant. He had a McClellan saddle on his shoulder. Joe Hardesty was waiting for him.

Joe nodded toward the three horses at the hitch rail—a buckskin carrying a pack, a gray with several brands, and a round, chunky bay with an alert eye.

"Seeing you have saddled the gray," said the little man, "I suspect that the bay is my horse."

"He'll take you anywhere. What's more, you can shoot off him and he won't even blink."

The little man nodded, saddled the bay and glanced at the pack on the buckskin. "Got everything?"

"Except money. I went broke buyin' this outfit."

"Then," said the little man, smiling, "I guess I'll have to pay for your breakfast."

Half an hour later they left town.

When they were well out onto the desert and their course definitely established, Joe tied the lead rope of the pack horse to the fork of the pack saddle. "This old buckskin," he explained, "will follow along all day. That leaves both my hands free in case I want to pray for rain."

"You might start right now," said the little man.

Already the desert sun was beginning to do business. Flakes of mica glistened and sparkled on the upthrust rocks. The sand took on a warmer color as the sun devoured the lingering coolness of night. Far to the south, the peaks of the Pinnacles glowed red against a hazy sky. It promised a hot day.

They were heading, not north toward the Blue Range, but south toward the badlands. Leaving the Cut, the bandits had ridden north. Joe shrugged. The little man was bossing this job.

They were several miles out of Bowdry when Joe dismounted to see if the pack was riding all right. The rope was new and would stretch. The little man seated himself on a rock and lighted a cigar. "See anything queer about this?" he said, handing a ten dollar bill to Joe.

"Not if you're givin' it to me."

The little man produced another ten dollar bill and a small magnifying glass. "You ought to know how to use a glass. Take a good look at both bills."

For a man supposed to be trailing a gang of train robbers, the little man seemed to be playing a peculiar game. Joe ran the glass carefully over each bill. "I can't see no difference," he said finally. "Unless them little lines around the ten are a mite heavier on this one."

The little man smiled. "A good many bank tellers wouldn't have spotted that. It is one of the best counterfeits I've ever seen."

Joe laughed. "Did you make it?"

"No. But the man who did is an artist. His twenties are even better than his tens."

Joe stood by his horse, waiting to hear more about counterfeit money. But apparently Six had nothing further to say.

As they rode on, Joe covertly sized up his companion, noting that he sat solid and straight in the saddle, yet rode easily, saving his horse. In fact something had transformed Six from a dude in neat city clothes into an outdoor man who looked and acted as if he had been there before—and plenty.

That was all right with Joe. But what about that counterfeit money? Joe's suspicion of all city folks excited his imagination. Now wouldn't it be a surprise for grandma if the money paid for the horses and the outfit was counterfeit? Six didn't look like a crook. But you never could tell. Some of these city sharps were pretty slick.

Suddenly it occurred to Joe that Six wasn't wearing his glasses. Hadn't been wearing them since they left Bowdry. Joe asked Six if he had lost them.

"For a few days—or weeks, possibly," replied Six.

"I left mine on the piano, likewise," said Joe. And he glanced back to see if the pack horse was coming along all right.

THE slant of the sun grew steeper. Burning light struck sand and rock and shot up in stinging needles of heat. Impalpable gray dust began to settle on their hats and shoulders, on the ridges above the horses' half-closed eyes. Distant heat waves, almost as visible as water, rolled across the sand. The Pinnacles grew taller and sharper.

For some time Six had been slowly working east at a long slant. But Joe surmised that he wasn't heading for the hills, and shade. He hadn't said a word about the heat.

About half an hour later they cut suddenly into the plain trail of several horses. The tracks were fresh. They came from the north and swept on toward the Pinnacles.

"How many?" asked Six.

Joe dismounted, followed the tracks for a few yards and then came back. "I make it six."

"They headed north from the Cut," said the little man. "But I had an idea they would swing south. I'm calling their bluff."

"You're a good guesser," stated Joe.

"It wasn't guessing. Natural deduction."

Whatever that meant, it was all right with Joe. Six was boss.

As they followed the trail left by the horses, the little man amplified his deduction. Seven men, he estimated, had set out to hold up the Limited. One of them was dead. Six were still at large, and they were riding south. Probably heading for the border. They had, Six declared positively, made a pretty big haul—some thirty thousand dollars in currency. The gang wouldn't hold together long. There would be differences of opinion, quarrels, and the constant urge in each man to keep well out of range of the law. Eventually the gang would split up. Six hoped to overtake them before that happened. He smiled to himself. These hold-up men were carrying absolute evidence that they had robbed the Limited. And they didn't know it.

"Looks like a right tough job," said Joe. "With all that money they—"

"Money?" Six spoke as if he hadn't

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mentioned money. "Now I'd be surprised if they had twenty dollars among them."

Joe thought Six must be suffering from the heat.

The sun was straight up when they reached the slope edging the big basin surrounded by its giant spires. Six rode up to the rim, dismounted and peered down at the shimmering sandy floor below. He seemed to be making up his mind about something. Joe misinterpreted his silence. "I'll go down in and look around."

Six said quietly, "Suppose you wait till I decide what we'll do."

Joe's mouth tightened, "What I mean," he said stiffly, "I was raised in this here country. I been here before."

"Then," said Six with a peculiar smile, "you must know that there's a small stone corral in the triangle beyond the spring. Snug place for a man with a rifle to hide out and do some damage to visitors."

Joe stared at Six as if resenting his familiarity with the badlands. "Well, what in hell are you goin' to do?" he blurted.

"Take it easy. And see if we can find any tracks coming out of the basin."

Joe came to himself with a jolt. The little man had him there. Sore at himself as well as at the little man, Joe said, "Sure we can look for tracks. But they'll be damn hard to find on these rocks. 'Course we can circle the Pinnacles. But that will take plenty time."

"We've got it," said Six. "Go ahead."

Joe rode down to the desert level and began to circle the Pinnacles. A few minutes later he came back. "Damn funny! We trailed six horses up to this here hide-out. But only five took on south."

Six nodded. He mounted the bay. "We'll ride down in," he told Joe. Six took the lead.

WORKING his way shrewdly down the rough, narrow trail, the old pack horse followed. He had been to Pinnacle water hole before.

When they reached the floor of the basin they noted that the smooth sand had been cut by the tracks of several horses. Six nodded toward the crevice that concealed the spring.

Instead of riding directly across the basin they kept to the circling cliff, working toward the spring in its shadow. No sound disturbed the hot, palpitating silence. The horses smelled water and mouthed their bits. When they reached the rocky shoulder beyond which lay the water hole, the old pack horse deliberately crowded past them, rounded the angle and disappeared.

"Let him go," Six gestured. And he sat his horse, listening.

A few seconds later the pack horse reappeared, came up to the others and stood as if waiting for someone to make a move. Joe and Six exchanged glances. The buckskin had been to the spring. Yet his muzzle was not wet. And the Pinnacles water hole never went dry.

Six dismounted briskly, flipped the Luger from its holster and peered round the rocky angle. He turned and gestured to Joe. "Step down and lend a hand. He looks pretty heavy."

The rugged figure of a man in jeans and a faded cotton shirt lay with head and shoulders in the spring. His legs were drawn up stiffly.

They dragged him out and turned him over. He had been shot in the belly. Sign showed that he hadn't died immediately, but had dragged himself from the heap of fresh ashes to the edge of the spring.

"That makes it five, all right," said Joe. "Wonder who he is?"

"I'm more interested," said Six, "in what he was."

Six hadn't seemed surprised to find a dead man at the Pinnacles. Nor did he seem interested in the fact that six men had ridden into the basin and only five men had left. Five men and five horses. Where, Joe asked himself, was the dead man's horse?

After their meal of canned tomatoes and crackers, Joe sauntered back to the stone corral. He sniffed, then cautiously approached the farther wall and peered over. A gaunt, ribby horse lay against the base of the wall. It had been shot in the forehead.

Six, Joe remembered, had already

taken the precaution of looking back of the wall. He must have seen the dead horse.

Casually Joe reported his find. Six nodded. "Sorrel, with a blaze face."

"You sure take your time spreadin' the news," said Joe.

"Seemed unnecessary. The news was spreading itself."

Six gestured toward the dead man. "The gang pretty well cleaned him. But they overlooked this." Six displayed a bill which had been folded and tucked under the sweat band of the dead man's hat. "Another counterfeit, this time a twenty," he told Joe. "I'll show you what to look for."

Even so, it took Joe quite a while to appreciate the difference between the counterfeit and the genuine twenty Six offered in comparison.

Six got up, shook the sand off his pants and stood for a moment gazing at the grotesque, ragged outline of the Pinnacles. "Dante missed a bet," he said.

"Was he the fella that made them counterfeits?"

Six smiled. "No. But he raised a lot of hell, at that."

Joe snugged down the pack. Far in the hot sky a buzzard circled lazily. Even at that great height it could see the three black dots moving across the basin of the Pinnacles. They left behind them a black dot that didn't move. The buzzard circled lower.

Down on the desert level again, they turned south. Ahead lay the mottled barrenness of the badlands. Far to the right ran the wavering blue line of the Mebbyso range. A distant gray spot at the foot of the range marked the Mebbyso mine. There was shade there, and cool mountain water. Joe wondered how his partner Bedrock was getting along.

CHAPTER III

TROUBLE IN GRANT

BY FOUR o'clock they were out of the badlands and following track which led them across the sandy desert, with its stunted greasewood and cactus, and straggling ocotillo. The accumulated heat of the afternoon rose like invisible fire. Six reined up and drank from his canteen.

Joe said, "I was waitin' for you to do that quite a spell. What I mean, it's goddam hot."

Six started as if a bee had stung him in the pants. "Say that again, will you, Joe?"

Joe obliged.

"My business," said Six, "has taken me pretty well all over Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and certain of the less advertised sections of California. But never before have I heard a native admit to a tenderfoot that it was hot, or cold, or anything, unless the tenderfoot squealed first."

"Tenderfoot my"—Joe hesitated a full moment—"neck," he concluded virtuously.

"Thanks for the amendment," said Six, as they rode on.

Round a shoulder of the distant range lay Grant, a crossroads settlement, a population of twelve, a combination store and post office, saloon, blacksmith shop, and several adobes strung along the road that led back into the secluded country known as the Other Valley. As the trail of the bandits led unwaveringly toward the settlement, Joe assumed that Six wouldn't ride into town without first figuring on the chances of trouble.

Time and circumstances were slowly crowding out of Joe's mind the original influence of a neat gray suit and horn-rimmed glasses.

In the next few minutes it evaporated entirely.

Sitting sideways in the saddle, Six said, "Joe, today has been a pretty fair test of our partnership. You've had to bite your lip once or twice. Even my best friends find it hard to get used to my way of doing things. But if I explained each move I made before I made it, I wouldn't get anywhere." Six smiled. "You'll have to take me on trust for a while yet."

Joe nodded.

"We'll hit Grant about sundown," Six went on. "The men I'm after may be there. But I doubt it. What I want you

to do is to keep your eye peeled for counterfeit tens and twenties."

"If them fellas bought anything off Old Man Simpson," declared Joe, "he'll be too damn scared to say so." Simpson ran the store and post office.

"Then don't ask any questions," said Six. He took a twenty dollar bill from his wallet. "Get him to change this. Chances are, if he took in any tens today they'll be on top, in the till."

"All right. But supposin' them fellas are in town?"

Six pushed back his hat. "If so, they'll have their horses bunched and ready, either at the saloon hitch rail or at the store." After a slight hesitation, Six described the mounts of the hold-up men, as he remembered them when they made their getaway after robbing the Limited.

There were only two horses at the saloon hitch rail when Six and Joe rode into Grant. They belonged to cowhands from back in the hills.

The Grant storekeeper's watery eyes narrowed when he saw Six come into the store with Joe Hardesty. "Hello, Joe," he said without enthusiasm. "Bedrock was in a couple of days ago. Said you was in Chicago."

"Mebbe I am. Anyhow, give me a couple of sacks of Bull and some papers." Joe laid a twenty dollar bill on the counter.

"Ain't you got something smaller?" complained the storekeeper. "Them fellas run me clean out of change."

Joe shook his head.

Simpson dug into the till and fished out a ten, a five, and some silver. Joe tucked the change into his pocket.

Six looked up. "Wait a minute. I've got a little change. How much do you want?"

"A couple of dimes will make it," said Joe. "Here you are, Simpson. No, I don't want the twenty back. Give me another ten."

Grumbling, the storekeeper complied.

Six stepped to the doorway and stood looking up and down the evening street. Simpson leaned over the counter. "Seems like I saw that fella before, somewhere."

Joe shrugged as if Six were of little consequence. "City man. Comes from Denver. He's workin' on some kind of a surveyin' job here for the government."

Simpson seemed disappointed.

SIX was sitting on the store veranda, smoking a cigar and examining the two tens Joe received for the twenty. Joe was over in the blacksmith shop arranging for a feed for the horses. It lacked about half an hour of sunset.

The man coming down the mountain road, Six noted, was riding a sorrel-and-white horse. Six was unable to distinguish the man's features. But the splashes of white on the sorrel horse loomed plain enough. One of the bandits that had held up the Limited had ridden a red-and-white pinto.

Six continued to smoke placidly. The storekeeper came out, locked the door and started to cross the street to his home. The man riding the pinto dismounted at the saloon hitch rail, glanced sharply at Six, and entered the saloon.

Halfway across the street the storekeeper stopped, stood tugging at his long mustache. Ever since the five strangers had entered town he had been literally trembling in his boots. Not that they had acted tough. They hadn't. They had been quiet—too quiet. They paid for the grub and tobacco, took a few drinks in the saloon, and then left town, riding back into the hills.

Simpson wished he had told Joe Haddesty what he suspected. Joe wasn't scared of anything that wore britches. But Joe had disappeared.

Simpson came back to where the little man sat smoking. "When you see Joe," the storekeeper's voice shook, "tell him there was a wild bunch in town this evenin'. They took up the Other Valley road. Tell him I figure they're goin' to come back and rob the store."

The storekeeper nodded toward the saloon. "That fella that just went in there, he was with 'em."

Six got to his feet. "What are you going to do?"

"Can't do nothing. There's five of 'em."

"Yes, you can! Get that shotgun I saw standing behind the counter. Take it over to your house. You can watch the store from your front window. If

anybody tries to break in, let 'em have it. Use buckshot."

"If you and Joe'll back me up." Simpson glanced apprehensively toward the saloon.

"Go head," said Six.

Leaning casually against the veranda post, Six kept his eye on the saloon doorway. If the man who had just gone in was one of the gang, and he saw the storekeeper packing a shotgun across the street, he might become interested. It was at least worth trying on.

Simpson came out and locked the door. He was trembling visibly, but he had the shotgun and a box of ammunition. As he started to cross the street to his house he dropped the box of shells. It broke open as it struck the ground. He was stooping to pick up the scattered cartridges when the man who had ridden the pinto horse stepped out of the saloon.

He saw the little man in a khaki suit leaning against the veranda post. He saw Simpson grab a handful of shells and start for the house.

"Hey!" he called to the storekeeper. "Where do you think you're going?"

Simpson stopped. His face went white. "Going to get supper," he stammered.

"Like hell you are!" The man in front of the saloon dropped his hand to his belt.

Crazy with fear, the storekeeper raised his shotgun.

"Hold on!" cried Six.

For the fraction of a second the bandit's eyes flickered. He whipped out his gun. Six jerked the Luger from his shoulder holster. A ripple of shots broke the silence.

On hands and knees, a stocky, black-haired man with an unshaven face was coughing and choking to death. Farther down the street the storekeeper stood fiddling with a shotgun. Across the street the storekeeper's wife, a thin, gray-haired woman, was just opening the door of her house.

Six pulled the clip from the Luger and reloaded it.

The reaction was too much for Simpson. Fumbling, he cocked the shotgun, and moving like a sleepwalker came toward the man Six had shot.

"Jim!" cried the storekeeper's wife. "Drop that gun and come in here!"

Muttering to himself, Simpson turned and stalked to the house.

JOE and the blacksmith came on the run. The two cowhands popped out of the saloon. Six was now bending over the man he had shot.

"Who done it?" asked the cowboy named Swan.

"Reckon it was him." The other cowboy indicated Six.

Swan, who was pretty drunk, lurched up to Six. "That fella—friend of mine—bought me a drink—"

Six straightened up. "Hadn't you better take your load somewhere and let it cool off?"

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Swan was getting ready to let go a haymaker.

Six swung and took him on the cheek with the flat of his hand. It sounded like a pistol shot. The drunken cowhand straightened up and stared at the little man, who now seemed to loom as big as a box car.

"Take your horse and get out of here before you get into trouble," said Six.

"That goes for you too, Hicks," said Joe, as Swan's companion showed signs of taking a hand in the argument.

"Who told you to horn in?"

"Nobody. I'm just tellin' you."

Six turned his back on the cowhands and nodded to Joe. "Let's get this man out of the street."

The two cowhands watched Six and Joe carry the body to the store veranda, then went back into the saloon.

Six was going through the clothing of the dead man when the blacksmith said, "When you fellas get through with your job, you better come over to my house and eat."

"Thanks," said Six. He took a blood-stained money belt from the bandit's body and handing it to Joe told him to take care of it.

The two cowhands lounging at the bar were somewhat surprised when Six walked into the saloon. "Boys," he said quietly, "I believe you were told to get out of town."

"You ain't talkin' to me," said Hicks.

With his hat pushed back and his thumb in his belt, Joe sauntered in. Dusk was settling down. The little man, seated on a wall table, swinging one leg, was intently examining a peculiar-looking pistol. He seemed unaware that there was anybody else in the room.

"Come on, Bill." Hicks took hold of the other cowboy's arm.

They swaggered out and swung up onto their ponies. Six came to the doorway. As they spurred up the mountain road, Swan turned in the saddle and threw a shot at Six. It drilled a hole in the saloon front about three feet above his head.

Joe beckoned to Six, and introduced him to the saloonkeeper.

"Joe was askin' me," said the saloonkeeper, untying a small sack, and dumping some silver and a couple of bills onto the bar, "if I took in any tens or twenties today." He picked up one of the bills. "I took in this here ten. Recollect it, because it's new."

Six examined the bill. "If that bunch that was here this afternoon happen to come back, probably you'll take in some more like this. I'll give you a dollar for it. It's counterfeit."

The saloonkeeper shook his head. "I reckon I can get rid of it. I owe Old Man Simpson for some canned stuff. And his eyesight ain't any too good."

As they left the saloon Joe said, "Wonder what that fella on the paint horse come back for?"

Six glanced at the body on the store veranda. "I'd say those highbinders planned to camp back in the hills somewhere, and that he came back to look around before they settled down."

They crossed the street to where the blacksmith stood in his doorway. He told them that supper was ready.

When they came out, about half an hour later, Six told Joe to saddle the horses. "I'll take that money belt," he added.

"Going after 'em?" Joe gestured toward the mountain road. "What I mean—if you are, we won't need the pack horse."

"We'll need him," said Six.

Joe made for the corral.

CHAPTER IV

SHERIFF'S POSSE

WHEN Joe came leading the horses, Six untied the pinto at the saloon hitch rail, hung the reins on the horn and slapped the horse on the rump. The pinto took up the mountain road on the run. Tied to the saddle horn so that it wouldn't get jolted off was the dead man's money belt. It showed a dark stain. But the money in it was still intact.

Joe didn't say anything. But he was doing some figuring.

A few minutes later, Six and he came out onto the Bowdry-Grant road and turned south. As they plodded along in the starlight, Joe said, "What I mean—are we chasin' them fellas or are they chasin' us?"

"Why did they take the Other Valley road?" Six countered.

"Mebbe," said Joe cautiously, "so they could bush down and get some sleep. And feed their horses. They didn't feed 'em in Grant, accordin' to Old Man Simpson."

"Think they'll make for the border?" Six asked.

"I sure do!"

Joe told himself it was mighty queer that the bandits had left the main highway for the Other Valley road when they could have camped almost anywhere in the range south of Grant, and been that much nearer the border. And considering their haul from the Limited, Old Man Simpson's idea that they intended to stick up the store and post office was a joke.

Joe's reflections were interrupted by the faint sound of hoofbeats coming from behind. The hoofbeats grew more distinct. Followed by the old pack horse, Six and Joe swung from the road and pushed up into the heavy brush of the foothills.

The horsemen finally came in sight—four dim figures moving two and two down the dim gray road. Joe's scalp tightened. He had been right, after all. The bandits were heading for Mexico all right.

Following the faint tinkle of a bridle chain as a horse shook its head, a voice edged with irritation floated up the hillside. "I don't see no sense in riding clear to the line when we know damn well they headed for Claybank."

Joe pricked up his ears. He was wondering what the speaker meant when another voice said, "Jake wants this ride to go on record. Jake's got a conscience, he has. Like hell."

One of the men in the lead turned in the saddle. "You're getting your rake-off, ain't you?"

The man addressed said something the listeners on the hillside did not catch, as the horsemen disappeared round a shoulder of the foothills.

Joe let out a deep breath. "I owe you one," he said, turning to Six. "Them fellas that made the little talk about a rake-off is Jake Collins and his deputies."

"They're out late," said Six.

Out late! Now wouldn't that frost your slicker, thought Joe.

Six said, "Can we get across the range without back-tracking to Grant?"

"We could make it to the top from almost anywhere along here," Joe replied. "But droppin' down the other side won't be any too easy."

"The top," said Six, "will be far enough for tonight."

About midnight they were in camp on the edge of a mountain meadow surrounded by dark pines. The horses grazed in the starlight. Six, apparently, was asleep. But Joe was wide awake, chasing ideas like a dog with its nose to the ground trailing an invisible rabbit.

One of the two tens Simpson had given him was good. The other was counterfeit. And the gang had bought supplies at the store.

According to Six, the bills in the dead bandit's money belt were counterfeit. It began to look as if the gang were all packing crooked money. And they had robbed the Limited—got away, so Six had said, with thirty thousand dollars. And they hadn't killed the express messenger. That meant that he must have opened up the safe without making a fight.

Joe raised on his elbow.

"What is it?" said Six. The little man wasn't asleep, after all.

"I was thinkin' about that express messenger on the Limited."

"He had instructions to open the safe in case the train was held up," stated Six.

"Oh, go to hell!" snorted Joe.

The little man chuckled to himself.

DAYBREAK found Joe up making coffee. Six was still in his blankets, snoring like a freight pulling a grade.

Joe banged on the skillet with a fork. Six blinked, sat up. "Good-morning, porter. Are we on time?"

"I dunno," replied Joe. "Mebbe you do."

After breakfast Joe sanded the dishes at the spring. Six sat with his back against a pine, smoking. He looked like a quiet little man thoroughly enjoying a camping trip. Yet the machinery of his mind was oiled and working steadily. "Four lawbreakers," he said, "and four peace officers, rather complicate things."

"Since last evenin'," Joe declared, "I'm makin' it eight lawbreakers and no peace officers."

Six smiled.

"Only, four of 'em," Joe went on, "didn't hold up no train."

"Correct again!"

"Well, goddamit," Joe blurted, "do you think I'm dumb?"

Six laughed outright. "I haven't been holding out on you, Joe. I've simply been giving you time to do your own figuring, without benefit of clergy."

Joe squatted and curled a cigarette. "I kind of feel like I was hobbled, takin' orders and not knowin' the howcome of it. What I mean, I done a little trailin' in this country before I ran onto you."

"So I've heard."

"If I was bossin' the job," Joe continued, "I woulda laid for them fellas up the Other Valley road. If I was plumb sure they was the men I was after, I'da smoked 'em up. Then the job would be done."

Six nodded. "Aren't you holding out on me a little?"

"Mebbe I was thinkin' of Jake Collins, likewise," Joe admitted. "He was makin'

a bluff, pretendin' to chase them fellas to the border."

Six was looking at the horses grazing in the deep meadow. "Suppose we loaf up here until late this afternoon, and give the sheriff time to get back from the border? Then perhaps we can do something about it."

Joe gazed shrewdly at the little man. "It would be damn funny if we was to run onto Jake over in Claybank."

"Claybank? Now what would Collins be doing in Claybank?"

"Mebbe we could find out if we was there."

How was it, Joe pondered, that Six, even before he had heard the little talk between Jake Collins and his deputies, had said he didn't think the gang had made for the border? That, if somebody asked you, was something to chew on.

After the noon meal Six stretched out on his blankets and went to sleep. Joe prowled over to the eastern edge of the crest and sat gazing at the desert far below. Half asleep, though still aware of the vista of sand and shimmering heat, he sat up suddenly. Four horsemen, coming from the south, were moving along the road edging the foothills. They were too far away to identify, but Joe recognized the buckskin with the light mane and tail. It was Sheriff Collins' favorite mount.

When the posse arrived at the spot where Six and Joe had left the road the evening before, one of the distant figures dismounted. Evidently they had discovered the fresh tracks leading up the hillside. The posse seemed to be arguing. Finally they strung out and began to climb the slope. Joe reasoned they were trailing Six and himself, unaware that Sheriff Collins had intended to cross the range and make for Claybank.

Joe crossed the ridge and waking Six, reported.

"Collins, eh?" said Six. "Last man I want to meet. Throw the pack onto the buckskin, and we'll get out of here."

A few minutes later they cut through the belt of timber on the ridge and worked their way down the western slope of the range. Below, the valley stream, thinned by the hot weather, twinkled in the sun.

Reaching the stream, Joe said, "Here is where we lose 'em."

He turned south down the middle of the watercourse. They came to a pool, rode through it, splashed down the shallows to another and much deeper pool which emptied onto a wide, slanting apron of rock. Here they were forced to dismount and lead the horses.

The granite apron broadened to the banks of the stream, and ran on up through the brush. Solid rock on which wet tracks would evaporate swiftly.

Back in a brushy hollow they tied the horses and sat down. Six mopped his sweating face. Joe grinned. "The reason bein'," he said, "Collins has got a couple of damn good trackers with him."

Six nodded. "You ought to know."

Having more than once hidden from a sheriff's posse, Joe let that one go by default.

The horses drowsed in the heat. Joe figured it would take the posse at least an hour and a half to cross the range and reach the valley bottom. Meanwhile there was nothing to do but sit and sweat and fight flies.

FOR reasons which wouldn't have looked well in a local newspaper, Sheriff Collins was in a hurry to reach Claybank. Yet he felt that he could not ignore the tracks which led from the Bowdry-Grant road to the crest of the range. Assuming that no one would leave the road and cut directly into the hills without a mighty good reason, the sheriff gave his immediate attention to who and why. The sign around the camp on the crest wasn't hard to read. And it was plain that whoever had been there had left camp recently and made down the western slope in a hurry.

When the posse reached the valley stream, Chief Deputy Bardwell pointed to the tracks leading down the valley. "It's a cinch they weren't heading for Claybank," he said.

Sheriff Collins looked worried. "What do you figure?"

"I figure," said Bardwell, "that we made a mistake in not stopping at Grant on the way down."

"And showing our hand," blustered

Collins. "Maybe we also made a mistake not wasting time riding to the Pinnacles," he added sarcastically. "But we ain't making no mistake heading for Claybank."

Bill Hepburn spoke up. "It would be right interestin' if one of these," he nodded toward the tracks at the edge of the stream, "turned out to be a pack horse." Hepburn grinned. "Yesterday evening Kinney sold three horses to young Joe Hardesty. One of 'em was that old buckskin pack horse that used to belong to Tonto Charley."

The sheriff glared at Hepburn. "Why in hell didn't you say something about it?"

"Didn't think of it till we hit the meadow up yonder. Two horses had been staked out, and one turned loose to graze. That kind of fitted the buckskin. He don't need no rope or hobbles. When he ain't grazing he hangs around camp waiting for somebody to throw a pack on him and put him to work."

Collins turned abruptly to his chief deputy. "Take down the river a piece, and look around. I figure that outfit ain't gone far."

"Thanks," said Bardwell. "Where are you going to hide out till I get back?"

Hepburn snickered. The other deputy, Holliday, grinned. Bardwell was by far the most competent man in the outfit. Disgruntled citizens of Bowdry County had often declared that any time Hi Bardwell wanted to run for sheriff, he would be elected. And Collins knew it. This little assignment of trailing the unknown horsemen might result in the accidental removal of a possible candidate.

"We'll drift along up the valley till we hit the Claybank road," said Collins. With the remaining two deputies he turned and rode up the valley. Bardwell obeyed orders—but with a mental reservation.

Folks said Henry Bardwell was the best tracker in Arizona. If so, he went at this particular job in a queer way. He let his mount splash down the middle of the stream, making more noise than a company of cavalry. The chief deputy also whistled a tune as his gaze drifted from one brush-lined bank to the other. At the first pool he reined up, but continued to whistle.

He had no intention of following the trail farther. He knew every foot of the country round about, and its possibilities. He was simply making an experiment.

SITTING in the stifling hole in the brush, Joe glanced at Six. The sound of hoofs had ceased suddenly. The whistling continued.

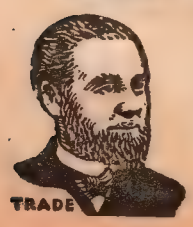
Joe rose and took up the reins of his mount. "If it's one of Jake Collins' outfit," he said, "I aim to head him off."

"Good idea," said Six. "Meanwhile I'll just make myself scarce."

Riding up the shallows above the lower pool, Joe began to whistle the tune that came from round the bend above. He didn't know just what he might be up against. And he didn't care, so long as he could keep the other man from discovering the hide-out.

"Well," said Bardwell, as Joe rode round the bend, "if it ain't young Joe

ROMEOS



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For the best tracker in Arizona, Bardwell went at this job in a queer way.

Hardesty, all dressed up for the party."

"Hello, Hi! Is there goin' to be a party?"

"That depends."

Wondering what had become of Collins and the other deputies, Joe said, "If you mean grub, me and Bedrock's got a plenty." He gestured down stream. "The old man figures to do a little prospectin' west of Coyote Canyon."

"Ain't you headed the wrong way for Coyote Canyon?"

"Hell, we won't be goin' into camp till about sundown," said Joe. "Unless Bedrock changes his mind."

"He'll have to change it mighty quick to get to Coyote Canyon before sundown," declared Bardwell. "I met him at Point of Rocks yesterday morning, with his burro. Said he was on his way to Bowdry."

Joe didn't try to dodge that one. "Well," he said, grinning, "just what are you goin' to do about it?"

"I don't know what you're doing down here." Bardwell eyed Joe speculatively. "But if I wanted to know, I'd find out."

"Mebbe so. But I noticed that this trip you come a-whistlin'."

Chief Deputy Bardwell smiled as he reined round and rode up the valley. After watching Bardwell until he was out of sight, Joe made his way back to the hideout. He found the three horses as he had left them. Six had disappeared.

Joe wondered why Bardwell, who evidently suspected something, hadn't followed it up. He also wondered why the chief deputy had trailed down the stream alone. It occurred to Joe that Bardwell might be doing a little quiet looking around on his own hook.

Six, with twigs and litter on his shirt and the crown of his hat dented in from crawling through the brush, came pushing into the enclosure. There was an amused twinkle in his eye. "Henry Bardwell," he said, "is a pretty smart man. Smart and careful."

"I didn't aim to let him get careless," stated Joe.

"I'm not discounting that," said Six. "And your yarn about Bedrock sounded mighty convincing, till Bardwell played his ace."

"He sure had me out on a limb—if he wasn't lyin' about meeting up with Bedrock."

"I don't think he was. And he didn't seem surprised when you showed up."

"I'm damn glad he wasn't," said Joe. "He's the only one of Collins' bunch I got any use for."

"I like Henry myself," stated Six. "Too bad he's working for a crooked sheriff."

With a swift sidestroke Joe captured a fly in his cupped hand. "That's tellin' me somethin'. But not about Jake Collins."

BARDWELL overtook the posse south of the Claybank road, reporting that he had "trailed three horses down stream about half a mile but lost the tracks at the big pool. It looked as if whoever it was had taken to the brush."

"Then your horse went lame, I suppose," said Collins.

"No," said Bardwell quietly. "And I don't aim to let him go lame. You see, Jake, I figure to be in at the finish."

The finish, so far as Collins was concerned, was Claybank. There, according to a prearranged schedule, he would hold a little private conference with a certain party, who, with his friends, would subsequently disappear until the recent hold-up of the Limited had become an old story. It was a nice little

arrangement, and financially agreeable to the sheriff.

"Damn funny about them fellas cutting over the range and taking down stream," said Hepburn as they started up the Claybank road.

"It couldn't be funnier," said Bardwell, "unless they happened to be a couple of Jake's friends."

ANOTHER hour passed before Joe and the little man left their hide-out and started back up the stream bed. Afternoon shadows were lengthening when they finally topped the west rim of the valley. Far ahead a dot of green marked the environs of Claybank. They would reach town, Joe estimated, about sunset.

The tracks of the posse in the gray dust of the road set Joe to thinking. It began to look, to Joe, as if Six were setting a trap to catch considerably more than a gang of outlaws. But springing the trap wouldn't be any joke. Four guns in the sheriff's outfit, and four in the gang, and nobody knowing how things would break. Looking it right in the eye, it wasn't such a hell of a pleasant prospect.

Claybank, a distant huddle of buildings in the sunset shadows, was an old story to Joe Hardesty. Yet in spite of his general familiarity with southern Arizona, it happened to be a closed book to Six. As they drifted slowly across the mesa, Six asked about the town.

"When this here road gets to Claybank," stated Joe, "it's the main street, runnin' east and west. On the north corner of the first cross street is the bank. Next is the store and post office, then Randall's saloon. Then comes the poolroom and barber shop, and Schofield's livery. On the north corner of the second cross street is Wong's restaurant. Back of Wong's is the alley, runnin' east and west clear through town."

"Got that," said Six.

"On the south side of Main Street is the Stockmen's Hotel, a harness shop, a roomin' house run by a Mexican woman, a jewelry store that don't do much business, a blacksmith shop, and the office of the town marshal. The rest of the buildin' on the south side of Main Street is Mexican 'dobes."

"Who is the big boss?" Six asked.

Joe pondered a moment. "I'd say, Arkwright. He runs the bank. But a fella's got to kind of figure on Judd and Randall, and the town marshal. Judd and Randall own the saloon and gamblin' joint. Judd is the card man. The town marshal—well, anybody's money can buy him."

Joe turned and sat sidewise in the saddle. "Arkwright and me is friends," he said, grinning. "And Judd and me get along fine. And I ain't forgettin' Wong, or Old Man Schofield what runs the livery."

"How about the saloon man?"

"Randall? Oh hell, he's all right. But he ain't no good with a gun."

"I appreciate the distinction." Six smiled. "I've heard that Claybank is a tough town."

As dusk closed down Joe and Six found themselves at the edge of the big arroyo east of Claybank. "I'll take care of the horses," said Six. "Suppose you slip into town on foot, and see just how tough it looks, this evening."

Joe disappeared in the dusk. Six led the horses down into the arroyo. From its depths, early stars became visible. Six sat with his back against a boulder, an unlighted cigar in his hand. If luck held, Joe would be back in an hour or so, he thought. Then for the wind-up.

CHAPTER V

A FIGHTIN' FOOL

JOE was poking up the dark alley toward Wong's restaurant when two men came out of the rear of Randall's saloon.

"Damned if I'd split with him," one of them was saying.

"You wouldn't," said the other. "But Bale is goin' to, accordin' to agreement. But Collins won't get out of town with it."

Whistling a tune, Joe kept right on coming. The taller of the two men stopped him. "Lookin' for somebody?"

"I sure am!" said Joe heartily. "A fella at the livery yonder said they was

a Chink restaurant up this way a piece."

"You're headed the wrong way. Chink's is back there." The tall man gestured toward the east. Wong's place was west of where they stood.

"Thanks, pardner." Joe turned and started back down the alley. The man called to him. "My mistake," he said as Joe came back. "My pardner says the Chink's is up this way."

"If that there restaurant would stand still a couple of minutes," Joe laughed, "I reckon I could find it."

He moved briskly along toward Wong's. He knew the men were suspicious of his sudden appearance in the alley. They wanted to find out if he was snooping or if he was merely some cowhand who didn't know the town. What they had said about splitting with Collins and how Collins wouldn't get out of town with his split, was mighty interesting. Joe surmised that the hold-up gang were in Randall's spending some of their money. Next thing was to locate Collins and his outfit.

Joe came pretty near finding out too soon. As he entered the back door of Wong's place and glanced round the kitchen, Wong himself padded in from the restaurant in front. He showed no surprise at seeing Joe.

"You come blime-bly," said Wong. He gestured over his shoulder. "Sheliff." He held up four fingers. "Flo' sheliff."

Joe nodded and backed out into the alley.

Joe didn't have to tell Wong to keep his mouth shut. Wong would do that. All aside from his friendship with Joe, Wong wouldn't have survived long in Claybank had he been a talker.

Folks said of young Joe Hardesty that he wasn't scared of anything that walked, crawled or flew. Joe had been scared more times than he cared to remember. But being scared had never shaken his physical nerve. However, he had his superstitions. Twice this evening he had run into an awkward situation. He anticipated a third. But he strolled leisurely across the street and entered the Stockmen's Hotel.

He was chancing it that most of the guests would be at supper, and, as was customary in that free-and-easy cattlemen's headquarters, that there would be no clerk at the desk at this hour.

When Sheriff Collins visited Claybank he always put up at the Stockmen's. As Joe had anticipated, there was no one in the lobby. He stepped over to the desk and glanced at the register. Either Collins hadn't registered yet or he didn't intend to.

On his way out Joe almost bumped into Chief Deputy Bardwell. Bardwell passed him with no sign of recognition, went round back of the desk and took a key from the rack. He was whistling the same tune Joe had heard when riding up the stream bed that afternoon.

Out in the street Joe did some simple arithmetic. Collins and his deputies were making the Stockmen's their headquarters, but their names were not on the register. They had eaten supper at Wong's. To Wong's restaurant add one dark alley, and Randall's saloon, and multiply by Collins. There was an answer, but just now it was out of reach. Later, the answer might be Six. As for Henry Bardwell, if he chose to whistle rather than speak, that was all right. Henry knew what he was doing.

HALF an hour later Joe reported to Six. The little man made no comment. But presently he said, "Can you trust the liveryman, Schofield?"

"I was tellin' you he's a friend of mine."

"All right. Come on."

"Sure!" said Joe with considerable sarcasm. "But I'd kind of like to eat before I get shot up."

Followed by Joe and the pack horse, Six rode up out of the arroyo. "I intend to take dinner at the Stockmen's Hotel you mentioned," declared Six. "Probably you would prefer to dine at Wong's restaurant."

"I don't give a damn where I eat. But I didn't know you was in the advertisin' business."

"Watch the papers," said Six, suppressing a smile.

Moving quietly into town they rode up the alley to Schofield's corral. Six dismounted. "Take 'em and put 'em in stalls. Unpack the buckskin and dig out

my war bag. Put it in the livery office. If Schofield is around, tell him I'd like to speak to him."

The little man's talk sounded like chopping kindling for a quick fire. Maybe, thought Joe, Six would do a little explaining before he touched a match to the heap. But all Six said was, "Meet me here in about half an hour."

A few minutes later Joe returned with the liveryman, introduced him to Six, and left them talking together.

Joe had supper in Wong's kitchen. The old Chinaman was washing dishes. "Sheliff no catchee?" he said by way of conversation.

"He ain't after me, this trip."

"You catchee sheliff," Wong laughed.

"Hell, no!" Joe lowered his voice. "But there is some fellas in town I'd kind of like to get a look at—four of 'em. Strangers. Tough boys. What I mean—was there anybody like that in your joint this evenin'?"

Wong stopped rattling the dishes to inform Joe that his boss—he referred to Judd the gambler who owned Wong's restaurant—had said there were four tough-looking strangers in Randall's, spending lots of money. Judd had also told Wong to watch his step if they came into the restaurant, for probably they would be pretty drunk.

"Mebbe come blime-bly," Wong concluded.

He was stacking the dishes when two men pushed in through the rear doorway. A third paused on the threshold.

"Flont! Flont!" Wong gestured to the men to go round to the front door.

Paying no attention to him, the first man who had come in, young, rather tall and good-looking said to Joe: "Didn't know your way here, but you know the Chink, eh?"

"Sure! Knowed him in Bowdry when he run a joint there."

"So you say. Maybe you got an idea you know us, likewise."

"No." Joe's black eyes snapped. "And I ain't askin' for no introduction."

The second man who had come in, short, bow-legged with a thin face, high-bridged nose, and dark eyes, said: "A couple of minutes ago you was tellin' the Chink you'd like to get a look at us. We're the strangers you was talkin' about. And if you don't think we're tough boys—"

"Put some pie in your face," said Joe. "You'll feel better."

The bow-legged man wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I'll put somethin' in your face—"

"Shut up, Cramer," said the man in the doorway. "No sense in starting anything."

Ignoring the suggestion, the man called Cramer walked up to Wong who stood by the sink pretending to dry dishes. "Who's this fella?" he asked and nodded toward Joe.

Wong shook his head. "No sabe."

Moving close to the trembling Chinaman, Cramer dropped his hand to his holster. It was a bluff. But Wong thought he meant business. Wong grabbed up a long, ugly-looking carving knife. Cramer side-stepped and smacked Wong over the head with his gun. Wong went limp and dropped.

Joe's right hand itched, but the tall man was watching him.

The tall man walked up to Joe, who still sat at the small wall table. "Got nothin' against you, pardner," he said in a friendly tone. "We was just kind of curious, listening to you talkin' to the Chink."

Joe was watching the other's eyes. Something was coming, but he couldn't even guess what.

"So I reckon we'll call it a day—and eat," said the tall man. At the word "eat" he kicked the chair out from under Joe, and was on top of him when he fell. Joe tried to get at his gun, but the other man beat him to it. "Regular little fightin' fool, eh?" he panted. Swinging his arm he hit Joe on the head with the gun barrel.

WHEN, about half an hour later, Joe came to, he was lying out in the sand back of Schofield's corral. His hands were tied behind his back, and there was a rope round his ankles. He was dizzy and sick.

"Pretty night!" he mumbled as he gazed up at the stars. He turned on his side, vomited, and felt physically better.

He cursed himself for having gotten into this mess. Flat on the sand, hogtied, and Six somewhere about town, expectin' him to show up.

Suddenly Joe recalled a Bowdry town bum who had bet the crowd in the Silver Dollar Saloon that he could cross the street with his hands tied behind him and his feet tied. "Sure you can," said a member of his audience. "You'll roll." No, the man said, he wouldn't roll. The man crossed the street in a surprisingly short time, and won the bet.

Joe wriggled up and balanced on his knees. He jerked his knees forward, managed to hop about a foot. He tried it again. This time he fell on his face. The idea was, he discovered, to lean back and hop, but not to try for distance. Spitting sand out of his mouth he tried it again.

His shirt was soaked with sweat, the knees of his overalls were worn through, and his nose was skinned, when he reached the rear entrance to the livery barn. He called out, but no one answered. Joe made another hop. The horse in the nearest stall turned its head, saw out of the corner of its eye a strange animal humping along the floor. The horse quivered and whanged the side of the stall with its heels.

Hearing the racket, the night man came on the run.

"What in hell you been doin'?" he cried as he caught sight of Joe.

"I was scared I'd lope off somewhere and get lost," Joe said, "so I hogtied myself. Set down that lantern and get busy with your jackknife."

Joe flexed his arms as he limped to the restaurant. He found Wong in the kitchen, and apparently all right, as he was cooking a meal for a late customer. Wong's busy little eyes hopped from Joe's kneeless overalls to his skinned nose.

"I figure to grow my hair long and coil it on top of my head—for next time," said Joe rubbing the lump above his ear.

"Lily man come, say, 'Where Joe?'" was Wong's contribution.

"Little man, eh?"

"He say, 'No Joe?' Mebby come blimebly, Landall's."

"Randall's?" Joe whistled. Over an hour had passed since he had left Six talking to Old Man Schofield. Six had said he was going to eat at the Stockmen's Hotel. Now he was in Randall's. What was the game, Joe wondered, showing himself like that? Maybe it wasn't Six. Might be a fake message.

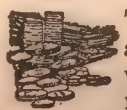
Noting the suspicion in Joe's eyes, Wong described Six as a small man dressed in a wrinkled gray suit, a small soft felt hat, and wearing glasses.

Joe asked him if he had a gun about the place. Wong produced a short-barreled Colt from a lard can that was, apparently, filled with folded flour sacks.

Joe glanced at the cylinder, and shoved the gun into his empty holster. His indecision had evaporated. He was heeled and on his way. Six, he hoped, was still on his feet.

CHAPTER VI

BET YOUR LIFE!



THE first thing that Joe noted as he entered the big saloon was a noisy group round the roulette wheel at the back of the room. Judd was standing back of the wheel, watching the players.

At the bar were Deputy Hepburn, Holliday and Chief Deputy Bardwell. They turned as Joe came in.

Hepburn grinned. "Well, if it ain't young Joe, all mussed up like he'd been crawling through the chaparral."

"Don't mind my britches," said Joe. "I wore 'em out prayin' for rain."

Bardwell eyed Joe sharply, but said nothing. Deputy Holliday grinned. "Horse set you afoot?"

"No. I set me afoot."

"Have a drink," said Holliday. He laid a twenty dollar bill on the bar.

Joe accepted the invitation. Hepburn bought another round. Joe paid for the third.

"Herding sheep—or just takin' in the scenery?" said Hepburn, as Joe declined another drink.

"Not any. I'm just huntin' rattlers to see how many buttons they got."

Chief Deputy Bardwell began to

whistle the same tune he had whistled previously.

"Three times," thought Joe. "Mebbe it means I ought to pull my freight."

As he sauntered over toward the wheel he caught sight of a small gray felt hat, a gray-clad shoulder.

His once neat suit wrinkled and mussed from being in the pack, his horn-rimmed glasses making his eyes look big and owlish, Six was bucking the wheel, apparently oblivious to the group round him. Sweat stood out on his face. He pushed back his hat, mopped his forehead and watched the ball spin in the wheel.

Opposite Six stood the young, good-looking man who had put Joe out. On either side of him were his companions, Cramer, and the high-shouldered man who had stood in the doorway of Wong's kitchen.

Joe walked round the group and took his place beside Six.

Six glanced up at him as if he didn't know him. The three men opposite were staring at Joe. Ignoring them, Joe placed a dollar on number six and another on number seven. "I'm playing six against seven," he stated. "It's a sure thing they can't both win."

Judd, about to spin the wheel again, said, "Hello, Joe. In town for long?"

"Till somebody tries to put me out," said Joe, nodding to the gambler.

"Got a system of play, young man?" said Six, in a hesitant manner, as if unaccustomed to addressing strangers.

"Not any," Joe replied. "I'm just throwin' my money around to see where it will light."

The wheel slowed and stopped. Cramer won ten dollars. Six and Joe and Cramer's companions lost.

"It doesn't pay to be reckless," said the little man sententiously.

"I noticed you didn't win a million," said Joe.

Six blinked as if embarrassed. "No offense, I assure you. I simply wished to imply that following a system is the only way to win."

"Well what in hell is your system, anyhow?" blurted Joe, playing to Six's lead.

Across the table Cramer grinned sourly. He and his companions placed their bets.

"My system," nervously Six pulled some bills from his pocket, "is not to place a big bet on any one number, but place a number of small bets judiciously."

"Go ahead," said Joe. "I'll follow your lead—once, anyhow."

JUDD, Joe noted, was beginning to watch Six speculatively. The gambler was shrewd. Was he onto Six? It was a sure bet the three men on the other side of the table weren't onto Six—not so far. Obviously they considered him a fool tenderfoot, just drunk enough to think he could clean up on the wheel. The three men had their bets down. Six seemed to hesitate about placing his money.

Finally he did something that sent a flash of heat up Joe's spine. Six reached over and placed a five dollar bill on each of the three numbers the men opposite had chosen. "I'll just copper them," said Six. "Then we'll see what happens."

That was drawing it pretty fine, but Joe knew that this game of make-believe couldn't last much longer. Judd had his hand on the wheel. He looked at Joe. "Going to play?" Judd asked.

"Spin that damn wheel," said Cramer. "The kid ain't the only one in this game."

"Ain't he?" Joe's hand came up. The three men opposite stared at the muzzle of the gun. The tall young fellow's eyes began to change. But before he could go into action, Six had him covered with the Luger.

"I'll take care of Stroud," said Six. "He's the bad man. The others only look tough."

The onlookers wisely backed away. A hum of excitement, then flat silence—and Hepburn and Holliday, followed by Chief Deputy Bardwell, left the bar and came toward the roulette table.

"What's the trouble, boys?" said Hepburn.

"I'm the trouble," said Six briskly. "These men are wanted by the United States Government. You're deputies. I'm calling on you to disarm them.

Don't act bashful," Six sneered." They've got their hands up."

Holliday, who was pretty drunk, said, "Mebbe you're calling. But the line is down. Who the hell are you, anyhow?"

The tall man, whom Six had named as Stroud, laughed. "He's loco," he said, indicating Six. "So is the kid."

"We're takin' our orders from Jake Collins," stated Hepburn. "And nobody else."

"All right, gentlemen," said Six dryly. "I've called on you for assistance and you refuse to give it. I'll remember that."

Joe noted that Chief Deputy Bardwell hadn't said a word.

Swarthy, lean, quiet of voice, Judd said, "Is this deal on the square, Joe?"

"You bet your life! If you don't think so, just take a good look at some of them bills these fellas has been layin' on your table."

Hepburn and Deputy Holliday glanced at one another as if considerably surprised by young Hardesty's remark about the bills. Then they apparently decided it was just a bluff to rope Judd in on his side of the argument. Clearly, Cramer and Stroud and their companion thought so, too.

Six looked worried. He had the men covered. But there was a table between. To step round it and take their guns would be a big risk. Although he hadn't said a word about the hold-up of the Limited, he was sure they knew that was why he was there. Given the slightest chance they would go for their guns. Then, there were Deputies Hepburn and Holliday to consider. Obviously they stood in with the gang.

There was also a fourth man to be reckoned with. But as neither Jake Collins nor he was in the saloon, Six thought he knew where the fourth man was.

Six had to take a chance. "Back up," he told the hold-up men. "And keep your hands high."

If he had them backed against the opposite wall, he could handle them without any killing. He wanted to avoid a gun battle, but hardly dared hope that he could.

The three men didn't move.

Watching Stroud closely, Six said to Judd, "Would you be willing to step over to the Stockmen's Hotel, Room 16, and tell Sheriff Collins I'd like to have him come over here."

Stroud grinned. His chief was visiting with Collins. His eye on the little man, Stroud said out of the side of his mouth, "Go ahead and get 'em, gamblin' man. The sheriff'll straighten this out."

"And get 'em quick," said Cramer. "I'm tired of holding my paws in the air."

"If you prefer to stretch out," said Six, "I can accommodate you."

JUDD, who hadn't forgotten what young Joe had said about the bills, was on his way out when Jake Collins and a short, thickset man with a swarthy face and quick dark eyes, entered the saloon. "Who is he?" asked Collins' companion.

"Damned if I know, Bale. The other fella is young Joe Hardesty. Take it easy till I find out what's goin' on."

Followed by Bale, Collins moved over to where Six stood. "What's the idea—stickin' up these boys?"

"Get round to the other side of the table, it you want to talk to me," said Six.

Collins stepped over to where his three deputies stood. In a low voice he asked Hepburn who the little man was. Hepburn didn't know. The sheriff swung round. "Put up your guns," he said, gesturing toward Six and Joe. "You fellas are drunk."

Six said, "Collins, these men held up the Limited and got away with thirty thousand dollars. They murdered one of their gang over at the Pinnacles. Another one of 'em got his light put out in Grant. Both locations are in your territory. What are you going to do about it?"

Collins didn't know Six. But he made a shrewd guess. Government man. Collins hedged. "Claybank ain't in my territory."

"Watch out for the fella that's with Collins," Joe said in a whisper.

Stroud's eyes slanted toward his chief, Bale, obviously expecting him to take a hand. Bale turned to the sheriff. "Jake," he said, "if you double-crossed me—"

It was Chief Deputy Bardwell who answered for Collins. "The sheriff didn't double-cross you, Bale. I wish to God he had. But you're up against the real thing, at that."

Bale moved back. "Who says so?"

"Get their guns, Bardwell," said Six.

To the amazement of the other deputies and the gang, Chief Deputy Bardwell stepped swiftly over to the other side of the table, apparently intending to follow Six's instructions. Collins' red face turned a sickly gray. Bardwell had lined up with the little man with the Luger.

Joe found it hard to keep his eyes on the three men opposite. He felt rather than saw Bale go for his gun. Joe heard the sheriff bellow something to his deputies.

"Joe!" Six cried.

"Got it!" said Joe.

Six whirled and dropped Bale just as he fired at Bardwell's back. Joe loosed two shots straight across the table. Stroud, going for his gun, doubled up. Cramer fired point-blank at Joe. But Cramer's arm was stiff from holding it in the air. He missed. Joe ducked down behind the table, aware that Six's Luger was chattering, that Six was stepping back and forth and sideways in a sort of slow dance. A slug plowed across the top of the table. Joe came up several feet from where he had dropped out of sight. Bale was on the floor, but had raised himself on one elbow and was firing at Six.

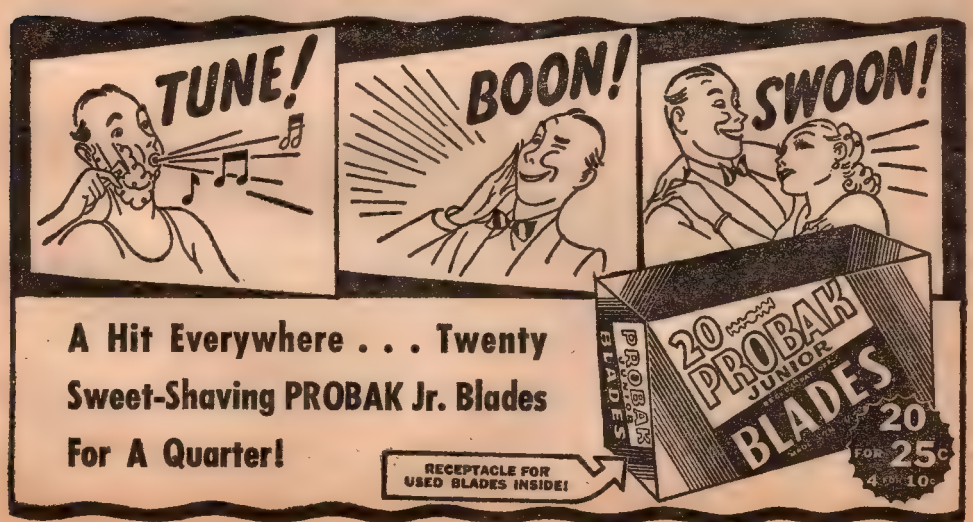
Cramer and the high-shouldered man were both loosing shots at Bardwell, who had jumped behind the partition of Judd's office. Half concealed by the door frame, he was returning their fire.

Suddenly Bale swung his gun and cut loose at Sheriff Collins who, with Holliday and Hepburn, had backed out of the fight when it began. The slug took Collins in the chest. He staggered to the bar and leaned against it. Bale's gun hand sagged. His elbow slipped from under him. He had tried, with his last shot, to get the man he thought had framed him.

The magazine of Six's Luger was empty. He was slipping in a fresh clip when Joe called: "Hi, you, Cramer!"

Cramer whirled to meet the challenge. It took him in the belly. A second slug put him down on the floor. Six's Luger came up. The high-shouldered man, battling with Chief Deputy Bardwell, threw up his hands and pitched forward. When examined later, he had three holes clear through his mid-section.

Bardwell was hit. He stood in the doorway of Judd's office, his gun on the floor, his right arm dangling. Judd and the bartender were helping Collins over to a chair near the wall. The sheriff's legs wobbled. Both Holliday and Hepburn had disappeared.



SIX'S little soft felt hat had a hole in it through the crown. And it wasn't a high crown. Moreover he was not wearing glasses. Joe pulled in a deep breath. He gazed at the men on the saloon floor. "I reckon that's all," he said in a queer, tight voice.

"Not quite." Six took out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. His quick eyes swung to where Collins half reclined in the chair near the wall. "Did they get him?" he asked Joe.

"I dunno. He looks kind of sick."

"Henry," Six gestured to Bardwell, "you need a drink."

Bardwell's face was gray white, but his eye was unclouded. With Joe and Six he came to the bar. Judd stepped up. "You messed up my lay-out some, but you did a good job." He stared at Six as though the little man were some strange being. "The drinks are on me," Judd added.

"Better get a doctor for Collins," said Six. "Is he hit hard?"

"Don't know. There's so damn much of him," Judd replied. "Barney, go rustle up Doc Simms. And if you run into Randall, tell him to come over—and fetch a broom."

Judd had laid a ten dollar bill on the bar. He was surprised to see Six immediately take it up and look at it closely. Six handed the bill to the gambler. "If you've got any more of these, you better put 'em in the stove."

Judd's swarthy face was expression-

Six whirled and dropped Bale just as he fired at Bardwell's back.

less. He glanced at the body of Bale, lying in the middle of the room, at Stroud doubled up near the wall as if suffering from cramps. He wasn't suffering. Judd's eyes drifted to the high-shouldered man lying near Stroud. Cramer, although mortally wounded, had managed to crawl under the roulette table. Only his legs and feet showed.

"The bar will do plenty business tonight," Judd said.

Joe helped Bardwell tie a bandanna

round his arm. When Joe pulled the knot down hard, Bardwell whistled.

"That ain't the right tune," said Joe. "God, this joint stinks!"

Six took a glass of whiskey over to Collins, told him to drink it slowly. The sheriff's lower lip sagged. His face looked more like pulp than flesh. The drink pulled him up. He stared at Six, slowly realizing that this little man in the dude clothes was still on his feet.

"Where is it?" said Six.

"Good God," said Collins, "can't you leave a man alone when—"

"Not under the circumstances. Where is it?"

The slug in the upper part of the sheriff's chest had taken all the fight out of him. He saw Judd and young Joe and Bardwell standing at the bar watching. He knew he was finished as sheriff of Bowdry County, even if he lived. The little man in the gray suit was a government man. He would never let up. Collins made a final effort to forestall the inevitable.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said slowly.

Six spoke in a quiet, almost a gentle tone. "Figure it out for yourself. Hepburn and Holliday quit you when they saw a fight coming. Why? Henry Bardwell helped me do the job you should have done. Personally, I haven't anything against you. You used to be a fairly good sheriff till you took to running with gangs. Where is it?"

Collins gave in. "In the hotel safe, in an envelope with my name on it."

"Here's the doctor," said Six as a stout man came in carrying a black bag.

Townsfolk had begun drifting into the saloon. The town marshal showed up. Randall and Judd talked with him. The town marshal was quite willing to acknowledge that this wasn't his party. The bodies of the hold-up men were taken to the jail. They would be buried without an inquest.

THE following day Six visited the sheriff in the latter's hotel room. Collins, stretched out in bed, was a pretty sick man, but the doctor had told Six that he would recover.

"I'm leaving town," Six stated. "I'm taking with me something like twenty thousand dollars, which your friends took from the Limited, including the five thousand which was in your possession. There's ten thousand I can't account for. But it doesn't matter."

"That's considerable money," said the sheriff in a weak voice.

"It would be—if it weren't counterfeit."

Collins' heavy eyes opened wide.

"They didn't know it," said Six. "You didn't know it. But I did."

For a moment Collins was speechless. Then the full import of the words struck him. "Nothing I can do," he said.

"Except," said Six, "make it a little easier for yourself. Resign. I'm not going to butt into local politics. My job is finished."

"I reckon you're right, at that," said the sheriff.

Joe had the horses ready when Six came out of the hotel. Six was a bit surprised to see Bardwell, mounted, evidently intending to accompany them. "Doc patched up my arm so I could make it to Bowdry," said the chief deputy. "Anyhow, I hate this damn town."

"Ever been to Chicago?" said Joe.

Two days later they reached Bowdry. Joe was with Six on the station platform when the eastbound train came in.

Six took five bank notes from his wallet and handed them to Joe. Joe was about to stuff them into his jeans when he noticed that they were twenties.

"Ain't you makin' a mistake?" he said.

Six smiled. "No. The surplus is a well-deserved honorarium."

"Mebbe," laughed Joe, "that's a fancy name for bad money. That there thirty thousand—"

Six, mounting the car steps, turned. "I planted it. Irregular proceedings, but it worked. And no real money risked. My glasses are also a fake. So long, Joe."

As the train pulled out, Six went through to the rear platform of the last car. He was smoking a cigar. He waved.

Joe replied in kind. The little man in the gray suit grew smaller and smaller. Joe turned and crossed the station platform. Bowdry seemed suddenly to have become a mighty empty town.

MAINE MAN

By BURROUGHS MITCHELL

HERE the woods path swung to the left, leading abruptly into sunlight, and Carleton saw with relief that a small house stood in the clearing ahead. He'd ask them there how to get back to the dock, for his time was running short and he had been lost for half an hour now.

Not that it had disturbed him much. Strolling along these woods paths, with

"Want to go aboard her?" Carleton asked calmly.

ILLUSTRATED BY I. B. HAZELTON

the afternoon singing of the insects around him, he had been very glad of his decision to explore North Haven Island. It was good to get his feet on rough ground for a while, and the cool smell of the trees and the way the sunlight sifted down were pleasantly familiar things. They made this an hour from his boyhood; they relaxed him, and he needed it, after the tremendous doings of the last week.

But now he must be getting back. As he strode toward the shabby, weather-gray house, he judged that the kitchen door would be the right place to knock, and it was. A moment later he was standing with his head very close to the ceiling of that worn little room, looking down at the woman by the window and explaining that he had lost his way.

"My boy'll be in shortly," she said. "He'll take you to the dock quick enough."

She did not seem surprised by Carleton's presence, or by his uniform. But then, he thought, she wasn't the kind to show surprise at anything. She sat rocking gently, with her big, gnarled hands laid out on the arms of her chair, her face lifted to study him. It was a sharply jutting face, and it gave away nothing as she examined him. Presently she said: "Set down, why don't you."

"Thank you, ma'am," he said, and found a chair. Her eyes were still going over him, and he simply waited, knowing something about people like her.

"Navy officer, ain't you?" she demanded. "What kind?"

"Captain," he told her solemnly.

"Where you from?" she asked sharply. "From Maine?"

"No, ma'am," Carleton said. "I'm from next door. I'm a New Hampshire man."

That seemed to satisfy her. "Thought it was something like that," she said, and hitched herself forward in her rocker. "You smoke, if you've a mind to. I'm going to ask you somethin'."

HE lighted a cigarette, and she watched him silently until he was settled back in his chair. "Now then," she said in her quick way, "I wouldn't put it up to a stranger, only you're a Navy man and a New Hampshire man, and you look sensible. It's about my boy—whether he should go into the Navy. He's old enough for it." She paused, seeming to expect his answer at once.

"Well," Carelton said, "that's hard to answer straight-off, you know. How does he stand with the draft?"

She nodded vigorously, her big hands smoothing the rocker arms. "That's it. You'd ask that, o' course. Well, they told him he wasn't fit for it, on account of his heart. But they're wrong, and he knows it and I know it. The medicine fooled 'em."

Carleton frowned. "Afraid I don't follow you."

"Didn't expect you would," she said. "You'll understand it soon enough." She turned her face away from him now, toward the window, and she kept it averted. "I don't like telling about it, but seems so I've got to. T'was my heart medicine done it. He'd took it once before, accidental, and he knew how it set his heart a-racin'. A little wouldn't hurt him none, we knew that; and so he took some and it fooled 'em. They set him down for a bad heart. I knew it would work so; I prodded him into it."

"I see," Carleton said. But he could not think how to go on. His glance strayed around that tight little room, with its shining copper and black iron, and he had the feeling that the story she had just told him could not belong to this house. When he looked back at her, she was facing him again, her eyes steady and defiant.

"I'm to blame more'n the boy," she said, almost angrily. "He didn't want to go, and I didn't want him to—go and be shot a way off somewheres. He'd be the second one from this house; the first was my husband. One was enough, I figured, and that's what I told the boy; they oughtn't take more than one."

"They have to take them," Carleton said, keeping his voice quiet. "It's something that has to be done, and you know that as well as I do."

There was silence a while then. "Guess I do," she said at last. "That's what's been in my mind lately. They have to

go—two and three and four from a house sometimes. I figured that out afterward, and then it troubled me what we'd done. I thought maybe he should join up of his own free will, in the Navy perhaps. But it wouldn't be of his own free will, because he don't want to; and I'm not meddlin' again. I meddled once too often already. So when you came in like that, a Navy officer and all, I said to myself: 'I'll ask him what's to be done, even if he is a stranger.' "

This was something all right, Carleton thought, frowning at the floor. She couldn't be fooled or put off, and yet how could he give her a straight answer? There were a few men who could, perhaps; there was one man—Carleton sat upright with his startling thought—but just then the boy came in.

"This is my boy Jeb," the woman said. "This Navy man lost his way, Jeb; you take him down to the dock."

"How do," the boy said. He bobbed his head, with no more than a glance at Carleton, and began to unload the sack he had brought in. His heavy, sloping shoulders and big wrists gave him an ungainly look, and it was surprising to see how deftly he worked.

"Take you down soon as I put these things in the shed," he said, and went out.

CARLETON turned to the woman by the window. A band of sunlight lay across one side of her face now, accenting its strong outline. She was quiet except for the stroking movements of her hands. She seemed to be waiting.

"I don't like to meddle either," Carleton said. "It's up to the boy. But there's a man I'd like Jeb to meet; he might help."

"You do what you think's right," the woman said. "I'm obliged to you."

Jeb led the way at a good pace, as if this was something he wanted to get done quickly. Soon the trail began to descend, winding steeply downward among the rocks and the pines; and Carleton noticed how easy and balanced the boy was, like a seaman during rough weather. A breeze from the bay reached them now, and Jeb put his face into it and breathed deep.

"Smells good," Carleton said. The path had broadened and they could walk side by side here. Jeb did not answer, but a moment later Carleton caught him furtively examining the

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Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Adventure, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1941. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Adventure, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation. the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1941. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 26, Register's No. 2-W-178. (My commission expires March 30, 1942.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.

naval insignia on his sleeve. "Like to be in the Navy, Jeb?" Carleton asked.

The boy moved a step ahead, so that Carleton could not see his face. "Don't believe so," he muttered over his shoulder. "Guess I'll stay where I belong."

They had passed only one house, a fisherman's shack; and Carleton recalled that he had wandered for nearly an hour before he had come on one. It would be lonely, silent living on this corner of the island; the few people around would keep to themselves, speaking only when it was essential. Lonely, yes; and there was the explanation of Jeb, Carleton thought as he plodded after the boy. Simple enough if you could see it. He could see it because it was a part of himself—a silent boyhood, with only a few faces in it. If you had grown up that way, it wasn't easy to change around suddenly.

Now Pulpit Harbor lay spread out below them, smooth and blue and gleaming under the sun. The character of the island changed at once, for there were houses along the shore, most of them summer cottages; and the harbor was smart with pleasure boats. Jeb had come to a stop; he was staring out into the bay where the blue-gray yacht lay moored.

"Want to go aboard her?" Carleton asked, and he saw the flicker of eagerness in the boy's face. Seeing that was enough, and it did not matter that Jeb shook his head now. Carleton argued with him calmly, and finally they were going down to the small dock, where two sailors had the launch waiting.

In the launch Carleton saw Jeb lift his face to the wind again; but as they pulled near the yacht, the boy seemed to draw within himself before the glitter and bustle of her. *He'd run if he could,* Carleton thought. *This will have to be done fast.* Then they were on the deck.

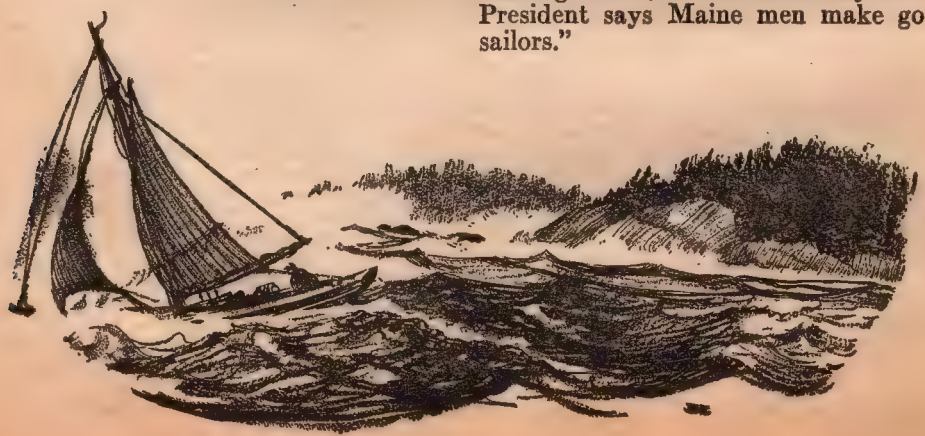
"Somebody I want you to meet, Jeb," Carleton said. He took the boy by the arm and felt the current of tension running through him. But Jeb did not speak; he allowed himself to be led down the deck to where a man was sitting in the afternoon sun.

He was comfortably relaxed in a wicker chair, wearing a white fisherman's hat which partly shaded his face. He turned his head as they approached, smiling at Carleton, and he took the long cigarette holder from his lips.

"Mr. President," Carleton said swiftly, "this is a young man from the island who wanted very much to meet you." He stepped back then.

There seemed to be no mark of strain on the President's face, in spite of that incredible episode in the Atlantic. Roosevelt was smiling and holding out his hand; and Carleton had a queer, tight feeling of excitement, as if he were Jeb out there shaking hands with the President. It was a moment or two before he realized that Jeb's face had changed; it had opened up now. Jeb was answering the President's smile.

There would have to be some reaction afterward, Carleton thought; but Jeb remained silent while they toured the *Potomac.* He did not speak until he was about to enter the launch. Then, shaking hands, he said suddenly: "The President says Maine men make good sailors."



His helmet flew off and he dodged back, swearing.

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

LUCK OF THE LEGION

By GEORGES SURDEZ

"WE'VE got him cornered," the corporal said.

The group of Legionnaires had taken cover behind a string of boulders on the slope and the man they pursued was somewhere among the rocks farther up. Five of them crouched, clutching their weapons, panting. The sixth was fastening a bandage around the arm of the seventh, Sergeant Griffan.

"Take it easy," the noncom advised, "easy! That guy can shoot and he's no slouch with a grenade. Yes, that'll do, there's nothing busted," and he moved the fingers of his right hand to show. He wiped his bloody palm on the sand.

Then his eyes swept the Syrian landscape, stark, arid, barren hills under a blazing sky. He thought, vaguely, of the many scenes he had beheld since he had left this region: France, Norway, England, Congo, Chad, Sahara, Egypt, Palestine. Two of the three men in his group who had fallen in the past ten minutes had taken the same trip. One was dead, the other not much better off.

A voice clamored, up the hill. *"Veniamo, signori! Non vi e da temere!"*

"What's he say?" the corporal asked of the world at large.

"That's Italian," said one of the Legionnaires. "He says to come on ahead, that there's no danger." And as he spoke, he pushed his body around the boulder, to look forward. His helmet flew off, a rifle cracked very near, and the man dodged back, swearing.

"Why should he speak Italian?" the corporal wondered. "Well, Sergeant, it's got to be done and he isn't far. I'll crawl out and try a grenade. The others can cover me—"

"Hold it, hold it—" The sergeant seemed to be puzzled. "I think I know that voice." Then he added, in answer to some unspoken question, "Could be, could be." He cupped his hands around his mouth, shouted, "Ooohey! Durbach! Is that you, Durbach?"

After a pause, the other called back, "Yes. Who are you?"

"Legion! This is Griff of Midelt—"

"All right, all right." The other evidently hesitated, then resumed, "I'll come in. But I don't give up. Just to talk. Understood? Just to talk—"

"All right. Legionnaire's word. Come on and talk."

A MAN appeared, came down the slope quickly, rifle slung over one shoulder. He was very lean, tall, possibly thirty-five or forty. He wore khaki pants and a kepi, but his tunic was almost identical with the tunics worn by the others, bore the grenade emblem.

He shook hands with the sergeant, then with three of the men, who greeted him by name. "Hello—hello, there. What are you guys doing here? I thought you were macaronis." He listened to their explanation, lighting a cigarette. "Well, sorry. I was in the jug at El-Habib, and got a chance to scram when the guards beat it. I was told that the Italians had landed in Palestine and were invading Syria. I couldn't imagine that, but there it was! So, I was trekking north to get to Damascus, with the company. When I saw your motorbikes coming along, I didn't stop to take a close look. Now, you say I hurt some Australian or other."

He broke off as two Legionnaires brought in the wounded man, laid him in the shade. The fellow was badly hurt, and the tan on his face seemed like olive paint. Durbach went and squatted near, took his hand. "Pinson, old man!"

"In the guts, Durbach. At six hundred and fifty—you're a shot—and I'm croaking. All right, all right, all in the trade—I know. Better you than a total stranger. More intimate, what?"

"It's a mess," Durbach admitted. "I'm no better off, poor old chap—no better off— This is a crazy business, they've got the Legion fighting itself! Well, Griff, I better go before that Australian officer shows up." Durbach peered at his friends with anxiety. "You going to let me scram, or you going to shoot?"

"Don't be a sap, Durbach. Look, turn in your rifle quietly, give up. You'll be a prisoner for a while, but every prisoner will be given a chance to enlist with us. We get British rate of pay, too."

"No kidding?" Durbach appeared interested, then shook his head. "Can't be done. I've got a murder charge on me, civil case. The English will do what the native authorities ask of them, to bring them on their side. And after me shooting like this, my excuse won't hold water. See, I was a sergeant, and tried to go over the wall to join the British as soon as the mess happened. I was caught and demoted. When I came out of the jug, I waited a while and tried again, with two other guys—"

"I thought you were German, so why—" Griffan started.

"I'm no Nazi." Durbach laughed shortly. "I'm wanted by them, too. Old business, something in Munich in '23. But they don't forget. Well, we were heading for Palestine when some Syrian peasants jumped us, over some food we were swiping. We killed four or five of them—we had our guns—but I sprained my ankle and the gendarmes picked me like a cherry the next day. I was sent to Damascus, at first, to jail—then brought back to El-Habib for trial. Due next week. The Syrians have it in for me, and they'll look among the prisoners, you can bet. So I better get out of here."

"You were trying to escape to us," Griffan said. "That'll count."

"The hell it will. How can I prove that? It's murder while looting, accord-

ing to the civilians. And if I hit an Englishman, as you say I did, the English won't be so keen about helping me. No, I have to beat it. I'll go now—"

"Listen, listen," said Pinson, the wounded man. "I got an idea. We make a switch. You put on shorts, a helmet—mine are messed up—but there's others." He laughed and coughed. "You're with the Free French and I am a wounded prisoner—or a dead one, most likely. The guys here are all regular. And the captain knows you. He's old Bandeleur. He'll understand. Fix records."

Sergeant Griffan consulted his men with a glance. Four were old-timers, African Legionnaires; the others already counted a couple of years of service, months of war. Each one nodded in turn. Durbach was a Legionnaire, had played his cards as they were dealt and deserved a chance.

"All right, Durbach, get busy."

"Hell of a thing to do," Durbach said as he drew on the shorts taken from a dead man. "To kill a guy and steal his pants." He was quivering and almost as sickly in appearance as the wounded Pinson. "But it might as easy be me—eh, Sergeant?"

"Sure. Sure."

"The Englishman won't spot me?"

"No, he won't. We were assigned with him just this morning, to escort his car. I was picked because I knew this country, and I speak some English by now. Let's see—yes, you look all right. All right, we'll signal all clear—"

A FEW minutes later, Captain Webster, Australian officer, leading a reconnaissance group, saw the searching party of Free French Legionnaires returning toward the path.

There were two wounded, one walking braced on the arm of a comrade, the other on a stretcher improvised with a tunic and carbines. The Legion sergeant saluted him. "Reporting, sir. One dead, one wounded. We have the sniper. He is wounded."

Webster looked down at the captive. There was no sense in questioning him for he was scarcely conscious. Webster admired him, a lone man who had fought when challenged by a detachment.

"How's the lieutenant, sir?"

"I believe he'll be all right. Ambulance coming soon. Might as well wait here; we were to stop but a few hundred yards farther. That wounded prisoner—what is he, a Frenchman, a Syrian?"

"A Legionnaire, like ourselves, sir."

"Ah, very well—" Webster walked down the path. He nodded for Griffan to follow, and when he halted nodded at the group of Legionnaires near the parked motorcycles. "Do you notice anything odd, Sergeant?"

"I don't understand the Captain, sir."

"I think you understand the Captain, yes." Webster's young, lean face showed a wide grin. "The wounded man was on number four motorcycle this morning when we started out. He had shaved off a mustache recently, and his upper lip was whiter than his chin. That chap there has very white legs. You fellows wear shorts, but I understand they're not always worn on the other side. You are trying to save a friend, aren't you?"

Griffan, a bit shaky, did not answer.

"I know this is a damn peculiar stoush for your chaps. But, unless I am mistaken, that's the lad who shot poor Geoff. You might give me the story."

Sergeant Griffan talked then.

"I see," Webster said after hearing him out. "He killed one of your men, wounded two others. Yet you say it was the suggestion of the badly wounded chap to—change over? Astonishing, really."

"We are Legionnaires. We know a man must fight for his life wherever his luck puts him. If Durbach had been sent to France and Norway instead of me, if I had been sent here instead of him, I would have been the man fighting alone. Shooting at Australians and Free French Legionnaires, and thinking I was shooting Italians."

"Yes. This business is not always very gay, is it? I see no reason to interfere. Nevertheless, that Legionnaire is lucky. It turns out he had bets on both odds and evens, on both black and red."

"My Captain is wrong, if I am excused, sir."

"Wrong? How's that?"

"War's a Legionnaire's business, sir. In a big war like this, the Legionnaire must collect on both zeros. He gets the house percentage, you see."

The guerrilleros raced after Quinto like a band of charging Moors.

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

VIVA CHINA!

By JAMES NORMAN

GIMIENDO HERNANDEZ QUINTO—G. H. Q. to his friends—blood cousin of Pancho Villa, had gathered around him at his Guerrilla Fighters' Training School at Lingtung a motley crew of foreigners, patriots and Chinese Nationalist sympathizers. The secretive CAPTAIN ABE HARROW of the Chinese Emergency Ambulance Corps had been there for some time. Likewise, DOC McKAY, volunteer Scots physician; CLIVE FIRTH, Quinto's first lieutenant; NEVADA, an American cowboy turned machine-gunner, who was in love with MARY WIER, daughter of the missionary PAPA WIER; and MIGNON CHAUVET, a mysterious and attractive young Frenchwoman.

Learning that MILDRED WOODFORD, an English journalist suspected of being a spy, was on her way to Lingtung, Quinto sent MOUNTAIN OF VIRTUE, a beautiful Eurasian girl, to meet her. The Nationalist Government at Hankow also sent JOHN TATE, a plump little American scholar, to watch Miss Woodford. Aboard the Lunghai Express, Tate met TENG FA, chief of the North Army secret police, also interested in Woodford.

On the day they arrived in Lingtung, Abe Harrow—who had gone for a walk up Running Wind Mountain—was found dead at the foot of a cliff. He had either jumped—or been pushed off. His three wrist watches had all stopped at different times. At dinner that night, Mary Wier accused Mignon Chauvet of killing Harrow. Doc McKay confided to Tate that Clive Firth was probably the guilty man. But Harrow had also been seen conversing with a stranger in a yellow coat at the North Gate of the Pavilions where the Internationals resided. Quinto announced that the murderer must be found. A killing without his permission was a serious breach of discipline. In Harrow's villa, Quinto found records of huge bank deposits. In the villa of

WANG, the banker, he found records of dealings with Harrow—and also a mysterious letter in cipher, saying that "receipts 1940 to 5620 will be delivered to Tang in Pan Tao and that payment on the last delivery will be made at the same time." It was signed by Colonel Nohuri.

they gathered in respectful, awed groups at the door of the office, waiting for a peep at their hero—Teng Fa.

"He wears *chung shan*, the uniform of a Kuomingtang official," whispered a farm lad from the South. "I know it's Teng Fa." He smiled broadly. "He has the walk of a young tiger."

Next morning Clive Firth was found shot through the heart with an odd-size .41 caliber bullet. Mignon Chauvet, who had been heard quarreling with Firth in his pavilion the night before, denied any knowledge of the crime. But Mountain of Virtue told Quinto an interesting fact: she had learned from Firth that Harrow had been blackmailing Mignon — who had fled Paris after shooting a man.

During a Japanese air raid next day, Nevada received a wound in his side which was discovered to be not from a bit of shrapnel but from a bullet fired from a .41 caliber gun—the same type that killed Firth. Such a gun was found in the air raid shelter. Then a letter arrived for Clive Firth, announcing the death of his father and revealing that Firth had been Lord Firth, heir to a large estate in England.

PART II

EIGHT hours after a certain bridge had disappeared in the Wei Ho Valley the Lingtung Pavilions had a distinguished visitor. Although the evening visitor came unannounced, word got around among Quinto's guerrilla students and

"Teng Fa," said another. "Last week I heard he was special guest of the enemy chief. It is his practice to live with the invader generals when spying on them. That is good protection. The best."

"Last week? No," murmured another student.

"And why, might I beg to ask?"

"Because last week he was in Tokyo itself. I have it on good account. And the Japanese little men thought Teng Fa was an emissary from Thailand!"

"So—"

"This is all foolish woman talk," interrupted another student. "Teng Fa was at the Grand Canal Front last week. It was he who prepared it for the great battle of Tai-erh-chwang which goes on even now."

The majority of students nodded in agreement. Someone brought forth a mah jong box and a dozen of China's fiercest warriors sat upon the floor, playing until the time Teng Fa might appear.

Within the office, North China's lively young Secret Service chief paced the floor, puffed vehemently upon a cigarette, chewed sunflower seeds, sipped brandy and scolded Quinto who was lying on his bed, feet raised upon a pile

of books. In his bright blue, knee-length Kuomingtang uniform, with a lethal looking Luger automatic thrust in his belt, Tang Fa looked like a dangerous Gainsborough Blue Boy.

"My good Captain"—he spoke in Chinese and shook a warning finger at Quinto—"in Sianfu no one minds your English friends drinking at the Guest House Bar but please send no more of the same kind. The hotel manager begs you."

"*Si*, but I had reason, Teng."

"And so has the manager." Teng Fa flicked his cigarette through the window into the darkened garden. "The English," he said, "are always dropping what you call 'hygiene' down the drain, and a pair of scissors, too. Guest House plumbing was stopped this entire day. Naturally, this is a blemish on the honorable name of Chinese bathrooms which are as modern as their American and English sisters. But when they fail to work, they lose important face. China cannot afford to lose anything now."

His mind delivered of this delicate mission, Teng Fa unwrapped four books on Chinese calligraphy which he had brought to Lingtung. They were the *Short Essentials* by Chang Yen Yüan.

"These I return to Mr. Tate," he said. "I borrowed them; there might be code within such ancient pages. I am suspicious of everyone. But I am so ashamed. They are indeed very good calligraphy. Mr. Tate is greatly honored to read them."

Quinto laughed and sat up. "Did all this bring you here?" he asked.

"No. I want to see Mr. Harrow!"

"Harrow? Why?" Quinto's smoky eyes lighted.

"A matter of State."

"He's dead!"

The lively, boyish expression vanished from Teng Fa's face. His features took on a dead-pan hardness. "You shot him?" he asked.

"No. Furthermore, I don't know who murdered either Señor Harrow or Firth."

Teng Fa half opened his mouth, showed a set of remarkably even teeth which he abruptly clicked together like castanets.

"Mr. Clive, dead?" he murmured.

Quinto nodded quietly, then, briefly, he outlined the course of the past two days at Lingtung. While speaking he flipped over his mattress and brought forth the Wang ledgers and the Nohuri cipher. "Very important for matters of the State," he said, handing them to Teng.

The Chinese lad scrutinized the ledgers and the cipher. Finally he put them aside, saying: "I suspicioned these would appear. I disliked Harrow traveling around China like a tourist. You understand. Teng Fa knows everything about everyone. It is very important to know everything. Now I shall solve these murders."

"*Sentate.*" Quinto suddenly frowned. "These are my murders. I'll solve them."

"No. It is in my line of business."

"You can help, but it's my place to solve them."

Teng Fa bowed. "I give you a week."

"You brought the three dossiers I called for?" asked Quinto.

"The dossiers? Oh yes. I know everything. There is only one person in China who remains a mild mystery to Teng Fa. That is your beautiful companion, Mountain of Virtue. She is the blind spot in my files."

Quinto knitted his brows in irritation. "The dossiers of Wang, Wier and Harrow, where are they?" he demanded impatiently.

Teng Fa tapped his head. "Right here," he grinned. "Who first?"

"Harrow."

THE young Chinese belched eloquently, then cleared his throat. "Mr. Harrow lived a short and unfortunate life," he began. "He was an American with noses for scandal. He worked for an American newspaper in Paris making much money on American business men busy getting away from their wives. They did things. Harrow saw things. The business men paid well to have such information withdrawn from history.

"In 1930 Harrow came to Shanghai for the same purpose. But there was more money being economic adviser for little warlord Lin Chu Pi in Chekiang. Later, he found a better position with Chu Fang in middle Shansi. One day Chu

Fang raided the Ping Yang foreign mission of James Wier. The daughter, Mary Wier, was kidnapped for a very high price. Wier was very angry. He threatened to kill Mr. Harrow if he ever saw him again."

"When was that?" Quinto interrupted.

"Four years ago—1934."

"They had no other connections?"

"Yes, perhaps. A subtle connection." Teng Fa pointed to the Wang ledgers. "This. . . ."

"What else?"

"Then Harrow joined the Chinese Service. He was a very bad soldier. He was under an official cloud—suspicion of robbing bodies at the front. This might explain the jades, watches and valuables you found in his room."

"What about Wier?"

Teng Fa paused, selecting a fresh cigarette from a little bamboo box he carried. "James Wier," he said, "has been a missionary since he came to China from New Zealand twenty-two years ago. His character is that of a bitter man. He believes the Chinese were purposely created to make life difficult for him. He also disagrees with our fine art of kidnapping.

"Mr. Wier's woman died ten years ago. The daughter was born in China but they are all American. Wier left America for New Zealand because he forged a check for someone, I think his brother."

"Brother?"

"Yes. The brother died in jail."

"Where?"

"Joliet, U.S.A. You want the year? 1912."

"Now we'll take Wang," said Quinto.

Teng Fa nodded. "Wang is a Christian," he began in a tone implying that no sensible Chinese has a right to join upstart occidental sects which have only a mere nineteen hundred years to their credit. "Wang has always lived in Sianfu. His full name is Wang Chin Pi Liang and his Christian name is Benedict Wang. He has trouble with wives which is why he lives in Lingtung now. He recently bought himself a *yima,* a number three wife. Number one and number two wife will not have the new one in the house and they argue so Wang has moved out to avoid the noise. . . ."

"Tell me about Wang, not his *tsang-tu,*" Quinto cut in impatiently.

"Ah, Wang. I have many files on Wang. He is a crafty man. He is always interested in making deals. We suspect he would make a deal to sell our nation to the invader if there were some personal profit in it. In fact, he is such a banker at heart, he might even do it if the Bank of China could make some profit. You see my file on Wang is most complete. I will give you his family history back to the Liang Dynasty."

"No. Just Wang himself," said Quinto. "Did Wang know Harrow, Wier or any of the internationals before coming to Lingtung Pavilions?"

"Oh, certainly. Wang banked for Harrow and Warlord Chu Fang. He negotiated the Wier girl release. A fine deal, that. Wang negotiated for $10,000 Mex, otherwise Mr. Wier might have only paid 5,000 dollars Mex. So it is to Wang's credit that he brought a lot more money into circulation."

Quinto thought this over carefully, recalling to mind the fact that Mary Wier had been seen knocking on Wang's door only twenty-four hours ago.

There came a rap upon the door. John Tate entered. He was puffing excitedly while behind him, a score of guerrilleros craned their necks to catch a glimpse of their hero. For an instant, Tate goggled in surprise at Teng Fa, then he took hold of himself.

"Say, Quinto. There's been a theft," he said. "The museum case out in the hall. The Generalissimo's teeth are gone!"

CHAPTER XI

DRAW—WITH TABLE STAKES

THE table on the garden terrace beyond the billiard room had been cleared. The oil lamps had been removed and in their place was a dazzling bright gasoline lamp which carved a big room of whiteness out of the jasmine scented dark.

A rack of poker chips and two decks of well worn cards stood on the table's

oaken surface. Teng Fa fiddled with the cards while occasionally glancing from Tate to Quinto.

"I took the liberty of having Sergeant Sun invite a few guests," Teng explained. "We've searched one solid hour for the Generalissimo's teeth. I have still a few hours before I return to Sianfu. Poker is very invigorating. It brings out characteristics. One can study minds! Perhaps the teeth will show up in the poker game."

Quinto smiled, glancing at Tate. "You play poker?" he asked.

"Very little. I prefer bridge."

"Then watch your betting. Teng Fa plays like a sharp. There is no one better in China, naturally save myself."

Teng Fa grinned politely at the compliment. Tate stared at the two men worriedly. A moment later Nevada entered the terrace. His cold, hard eyes surveyed the cards and chips calmly and he sat down. Something in the way he looked at the cards warned Tate that the lean cowboy was also extremely proficient at poker.

Virtue came in, her gown rustling softly, her face an oval of beauty. She was all in blue, like Teng Fa. Then came Wang who looked at each person questioningly before taking his place beside the Eurasian girl. McKay hurried in, squeezing into an empty place between Tate and Quinto.

"Draw, with table stakes," murmured Teng in a low, clipped, precise tone. He smiled ingratiatingly at each player in turn.

Chips were distributed. The cut for deal was made. Virtue bunched the cards, shuffled and dealt while Tate watched, engrossed. Never had he seen an Asiatic girl play poker. It was breathless to see. She sat perfectly poised, with a vague suggestion of a smile on her lips which never changed throughout the entire game. Her slender fingers flicked forth the cards expertly.

The first few hands passed sluggishly, then Tate opened on three jacks and filled his hand with two eights. He looked around cautiously. The sight of the players he was up against filled him with anxiety for nowhere in the world is poker tougher than in China.

The expression on Teng Fa's face was enameled. Wang looked inscrutable. Quinto's eyes were smoky chunks of ice as he stared fixedly at the base of the lamp. Virtue's smile was taunting while Nevada played a calm, relaxed game.

With certain hesitation, Tate pushed twenty dollars worth of chips forward. McKay, on his left, passed while Teng Fa drew one card. Virtue tossed hers in. Wang drew two.

The banker clutched his five cards up under his chin while his fingers spread the corners. His dark head tilted downward, staring wolfishly, not at the cards but upon the pool. Suddenly he threw his hand into the discard.

"Raise twenty-five," Nevada drawled.

Tate looked at the cowboy, worriedly. Then Quinto met the bet. Again the calligraphist scrutinized his hand, three jacks and a pair. He peeped warily at the others and finally, taking a deep breath, shoved more chips to the center.

"A hundred," he whispered.

"Raise it twenty-five," said Teng Fa. A burning cigarette dangled from his lips with a long ash that stayed with peculiar tenacity.

Nevada met the bet and Quinto raised again. Sweat broke out on Tate's roly-poly brow. He felt his cheeks flush beneath Teng Fa's close, impersonal scrutiny.

The betting ran another round, then Tate called. He looked at the three hundred dollar pot hopefully while laying out his hand. His hopes went up when Nevada threw his into the discard. Then Teng Fa flicked three queens on the table.

"Plunging is dangerous," murmured Quinto. He placed four tens on the table and slowly raked in the pot. "You see. I told you, Teng Fa and I are the best poker players in China."

TATE felt a little angry. During the next half hour he bet more modestly, finally he dropped out of the game along with Doc McKay. The chips slowly drifted toward Mountain of Virtue's corner and he watched with increasing amazement for the girl won each time the deal came her way. And each time,

she jockeyed the betting into a sizable pot before cleaning up.

Nor was Tate alone in his suspicion. Teng Fa's bland eyes studied Virtue's hands narrowly. Wang looked a little disturbed. Even Nevada sat back in his chair when the girl dealt. His mouth fell open a trifle while his eyes remained glued to the swift movement of her hands.

"Well, I'll be durned," he finally snorted. "I ain't never seen nothing like it. I'm sitting this hand out."

"It is very very strange," remarked Teng Fa. The cigarette barely moved in his mouth as he spoke. "Two years ago in Shanghai I saw Mountain of Virtue win five thousand dollars. She won it with three queens and a pair. It was Shanghai, wasn't it, Virtue?"

Virtue smiled discreetly without taking her eyes from the cards.

"And you won again at poker after the Embassy dinner in Nanking last year," continued Teng Fa. "That was a few thousand dollars, I know. And you won a British battleship from the admiral in Hongkong. Remember?"

Virtue made a helpless little motion with her lashes.

"But the admiral had nothing left to put up but his ship," she murmured reprovingly.

"You won a battleship?" Tate gasped.

Virtue nodded. "But I didn't take it," she sighed. "The admiral promised me something else instead."

Quinto frowned perceptibly, coughed and smoldered pinkly at the girl. She reached across the table and touched his hand reassuringly. "It was nothing," she smiled. "The admiral promised to help me rescue three Chinese patriots who had been captured by the invader."

"Did he?" asked Tate.

"Oh, yes."

There was a lapse of silence. The poker game continued, paced much faster than before. At length, Wang threw down his cards and with a curt bow left the terrace.

Teng Fa watched him go, then grinned at Quinto. "Does Wang wear store teeth?"

Tate looked up interestedly. The fact that a pair of historically important false teeth had been mysteriously lifted from the museum case struck him as peculiarly ludicrous and yet sinister. Were the teeth concerned in the murders? He discounted the thought.

She had won a battleship at poker once—from a British admiral in Hong Kong.

"Maybe someone is wearing the teeth," he suggested.

Quinto leaned back in his chair and rolled his eyes at the calligraphist as though the latter had committed a major heresy.

"The Generalissimo's teeth are a national memorial," he said. "Who would wear them? They are the turning point in China's history."

"Plus Chiang Kai-shek's," McKay put in tartly.

"You weren't in the Northwest when this thing happened, were you, Señor Tate? What occurred the eleventh of December 1936 will be forever remembered as the immortal example of the

strategy of *Ping Chien* or military persuasion which the outside world so rudely look upon as mere kidnapping.

"At that time the Invader had taken Manchuria and was marching upon Pekin. The Generalissimo did nothing about resisting that invasion except to fly up to Sianfu in order to find out why Chang Hsueh-liang, the Young Marshal of Manchuria, and all his Tungpei troops were angry at him.

"Then a most interesting thing happened." Quinto nodded wisely. "Chiang Kai-shek drove to Lingtung Pavilions to sleep. Yes, *compañeros*, he slept in this very building the night of December twelfth. Meanwhile at midnight, in Sianfu, his entire staff of blue-shirted guards and general staff were arrested at the Guest House. . . ."

"The kidnapping," McKay interrupted.

"The *Ping Chien*," Quinto corrected him. "It was just the beginning. Also, at midnight, a captain of the Young Marshal's guards set out for Lingtung with three hundred Tungpei soldiers. Before dawn they drove into the garden here in lorries. . . ."

Teng Fa grinned. "Fine fight!"

"The Tungpei were challenged and fired upon," said Quinto. "You still see the bullet scars in the scarlet pillars outside the door. In the confusion and darkness, Chiang Kai-shek leaped out of bed. He was wearing a night shirt. Quickly, he grabbed a robe, flung it over his shoulders and ran up the mountain in his bare feet. He left his teeth behind in a glass of water."

"What is more natural." McKay smiled.

Quinto motioned for silence until he finished.

"The Generalissimo hid in the cave on the mountain. He was cold, shivering, his feet were cut by stones and he was very upset. The destiny of China shivered in that cave. But the Young Marshal's captain pursued. He found Chiang and carried him down the mountain on his back and when they returned to the Pavilions, the teeth in the glass were gone.

"The Generalissimo was held a prisoner twelve days. He got new teeth which didn't fit well and it was such a lesson, he agreed to fight the Japanese. That is how a man can lose a little thing like teeth and become a great figure."

"But how did you get the teeth for the museum case?" Tate asked.

"The Young Marshal presented them to me."

QUINTO pushed his last red chip into the pot as he finished speaking. Teng Fa did likewise but instead of listening to the Mexican, he watched Virtue's deft hands as she laid out her final spread—three queens and a pair of fives.

Virtue calmly swept the chips to her corner, stacked the gains and looked at Quinto disarmingly. "The Generalissimo had very dirty feet upon coming down the mountain?" she asked casually.

"The lower trail isn't dirty. It's mostly stone," replied Quinto.

"No red clay?" asked Virtue.

"There's red clay only at the top and near the cliff where—" Suddenly Quinto paused. "Red clay, did you say?"

Virtue nodded. "Yes, Gimiendo. Like the bit you found in Mr. Firth's room."

"*Mas claro*, Virtue." Quinto spoke sharply.

"You will notice Wang's fine boots are clean today. I polished them this morning."

Quinto swung his chair down on all four legs. "So! You found the same clay on Wang's boots!"

Tate swiveled his eyes around alertly. "There you are. Something at last," he said. "Wang in Firth's room last night. His heel prints on the cliff. I noticed it myself. His boot heels were quite narrow and high, like a woman's heel."

Suddenly he realized that no one was listening. They were all staring at Virtue. Slowly it dawned on Tate. Shoe polishing in China is a very, very intimate act.

Finally Teng Fa pushed back his chair and hurried to the door. "I want Wang first," he snapped.

"No. I get him, then you," said Quinto.

Sergeant Sun's beaming face appeared from behind a pillar as Quinto, Teng Fa

and Tate raced from the *yamen* toward Wang's villa. "No gottum Mista Wang no more," he said. "He gone chop chop."

"Gone?" bellowed Quinto.

"Wang go Sianfu direction, much chop chop."

"How?"

"Lingtung rickshaw. Half hour."

"We can overtake him in the car. Want me to?" Tate asked.

"I'll go after him," Teng Fa cut in. "I'll have Wang for you. Please come to Sianfu tomorrow morning. Everyone should come. Tomorrow is Weeping at the Graves Festival. There will be many people in the city."

Teng Fa turned to re-enter the *yamen*. Virtue stood on the step, in the doorway.

"You wish the Wang ledger and cipher?" she asked.

"Yes, please," said Teng.

"They are gone. Wang took them!"

"*Cargan la Madre!*" Quinto exploded. "This is going too far!"

"To be expected," murmured Teng. "The spider takes his web with him. A very important web."

"Please." Virtue smiled charmingly. "Mr. Tate can reconstruct the cipher. You can, Mr. Tate?"

Tate blushed and hoped the blush was lost in the darkness. He agreed that he could reproduce the cipher.

"Very well then," said Virtue. "And as for the ledgers, this afternoon while Gimiendo was away, I made a copy of the important pages. Gimiendo is very careless. I knew this would happen."

She handed Teng Fa a sheaf of typed papers.

CHAPTER XII

"I'M A BRITISH SUBJECT!"

CHINA'S ancient capital, Sianfu, was always a sea of mud following the heavy spring rains. Muck cluttered the wheels of rickshaws and military lorries alike. Mud plastered the forty miles of gigantic medieval wall surrounding the cramped, dwarfish houses of the city. It ran through doorways, was tracked into government buildings, through the old palace and the Sianfu temples. It was packed hardest under the four huge gates which had once greeted the invading Tartars and Mongols and Genghis Khan. Mire ran deepest around the delousing stations at the gates and in the Moslem refugee camps beyond the city walls.

Now, the rain miraculously stopped for Ch'ingming Day. It always did for Ch'ingming was a major festival. The generals and the important people came to town looking for the graves of their ancestors, drinking a little over them.

With the rains suspended, the ceaseless dust again blew down from the Gobi. The dust and the sun returned to Sianfu its old familiar odors — the stench of packed houses, of decay and growth, of murder and intrigue. It lurked in dark corners and medieval alley-ways, ready to leap out at the unwary visitor.

"It's wonderful!" John Tate murmured.

To him, Sianfu was beautiful on this morning. His nose caught no odors. His eyes saw no crowds. His mind had only two thoughts, both equally beautiful, in short—History and Mountain of Virtue.

Sianfu was beautiful. Genghis Khan walked here as though it were only yesterday. The ancient scholars practiced in the palace, their deft fingers making strokes with the brush. Their strokes rose, fell, swept, crouched and sprang: new strokes in the vocabulary of calligraphy. Here one invented the *li* style which is writing like a tiger walks. Another perfected the *lsing* stroke with its informal soft angles.

Tate thought of such things as he stared vacantly over the head of the Annamite who pulled his rickshaw along the rutted street.

An officer, standing in a puddle of dust coated mud, saluted the vehicle primly. He saluted, not Tate, but Mountain of Virtue who was riding beside him. The salute might have even included Mildred Woodford who sat on Tate's left.

The rickshaw joggled along. Its blue covered hood was embroidered with great white flowers in an oddly Victorian style. Tate was inwardly delighted to

be spending a day with Mountain of Virtue. It made him sort of glow inside. He frowned, however, when he thought of Woodford, but Quinto's orders to take the Englishwoman sightseeing were very emphatic.

Throughout the morning Virtue had pointed out the sights. She had shown them the walls and the Drum Tower which was now used as an air raid observation post. And now she had the rickshaw halt at the Pei-Lin, the Forest of Tablets Museum.

Virtue descended, daintily lifting her silk trousers to keep the mud from their scarlet cuffs.

"You'll enjoy Pei-Lin," she announced. "There is much old calligraphy and rubbings."

Mildred Woodford wrinkled her Yorkshire nose at the thought of calligraphy. "I say, there," she asked. "Did we come to town to look at relics? Really, let's go to a bar, I'm parched."

"The Pei-Lin first," said Virtue, "then I'll show you how to drink." Her dark eyes twinkled.

Virtue went ahead. In the museum she walked slightly in front, moving through the forest of glass cases, touching a case here and there, explaining: "Here are tablets with very fine writing. The events of the five dynasties ending with Chou. . . ." She paused a moment before pointing at a life size portrait of an old man with roguish eyes and President McKinley sidewhiskers. "Confucius," she murmured.

She went on to explain the *thirteen classics* which were cut in stone, the writing of the Han dynasty and the Nestorian tablets with their double Chinese and Syric scrips which the Emperor Taitsung had introduced.

TATE'S slightly albino eyes fumbled with the precious tablets. His feeling of awe which had at first been entirely upon the historical exhibits soon shifted to Virtue's person. The Eurasian girl talked of calligraphy and such things with an astonishingly rare familiarity. Somehow, her scholarship reminded Tate of Doctor Hu Shih, China's mental giant who, after years of study, finally invented a workable alphabet for Chinese vernacular.

"Where'd you study calligraphy?" he asked her.

"My uncle, Mêng T'ien," Virtue smiled.

"Mêng T'ien!" Tate almost choked on the name. He looked at the girl queerly while his mind performed some rather startling calculations. Mêng T'ien was the celebrated General of the First Emperor—he who had finished the last thousand *li* of the Great Wall. Mêng himself had invented the new method of Chinese writing—with the brush. Previously, people were old fashioned and used the bamboo stylus.

Mildred Woodford had been listening to the conversation half heartedly. Now she spoke to Virtue and her voice was dry and condescending.

"I knew a Chinaman once, studying at Cambridge," she said. "Gad, I don't recall his name. Ming or something, you know. Perhaps he was your uncle. Do you think so, really?"

Virtue shrugged her well poised shoulders. "Oh, no," she whispered radiantly. "Uncle Mêng died in 209 B.C., that is, by your calendar."

The appreciative expression on Tate's round face suddenly vanished. His jaw sagged loosely as he peered behind the glass case on which Virtue leaned her arm. A sullen Chinese face blinked at him through the glass. Tate let his glance swivel around slowly. There was a second face. A third. Five. One winked ogrishly at him. He sucked in his breath.

"V-Virtue l-look out!" he finally stuttered.

The warning came too late. A dozen Chinese men, all heavily armed, leaped from behind the cases. The first two grabbed Virtue. Another two yanked at both of Mildred Woodford's arms.

Mildred jerked one arm free for an instant and succeeded in slapping one of the faces a resounding crack.

"I say, you can't do this! I'm a British subject, you know," she cried angrily.

"Famous last words—unquote," murmured Virtue.

Tate stiffened, feeling a hard unyielding object jabbed into the small of his

back. He envisioned nothing less than an anti-tank cannon on the verge of blowing out his fifth rib.

THE Guest House, in the center of Sianfu, was an amazing hotel. Built during a capricious moment by Chang Hsueh-liang, the Young Marshal, it had private baths, running water, central heating, a barber shop, swinging doors and a New York Bar.

The bar, done in chrome metal and blue tile was a sort of League of Nations for the North. Here, according to the menus printed in Chinese, French and English, one could indulge in such delicacies as White Horses whiski, lemin pie, FFPotatoes, chipped potato, ham-egg and hat cakes.

Here one saw the most beautiful girls in all China, handsomely dressed officers, old men with close cropped hair, Japanese masquerading as Chinese, White Russians as Red Russians.

On this particular Ch'ingming Day an American novelist, a British poet and a salesman for Caterpillar Tractors sat at one table in the bar. They argued about war and death as if such things came naturally in job lots. At a farther table sat the provincial Minister of Pacification, a tubby little man whose business it was to keep the Min-t'uan or local bandits in order. Next to him were the moody-eyed Civil Governor of Sianfu and General Ku-chu-tung, the Military Governor. The two governors and the minister watched each other with polite animosity and when they weren't doing this, they gazed at Gimiendo Quinto and Teng Fa with envious respect. They admired Teng Fa because he was a hero, and Quinto because of the twelve empty sherry glasses lined on the table in front of him.

Quinto rolled an ounce of the liquor in his mouth and puckered his lips. "And so you lost Wang last night?" he asked Teng Fa in Chinese.

"But for the moment," Tang replied with immense Celestial *shunp'o* or simplicity. "Wang stepped from the main road last night. He didn't enter Sianfu or the guards at the gates would have seen his papers."

"*Una cosa mala,*" Quinto murmured his disgust in Spanish.

"But I shall find him," Teng quickly added. "You may be certain of that. China is not so big that a man can get lost in it."

Both the Civil and Military Governors nodded at Quinto, at the same time making appreciative little noises as if to guarantee personally Teng's promise.

Quinto nodded his satisfaction and ran his eyes thoughtfully around. The Guest House bar was crowded, particularly with generals and self made warlords who had joined forces with the regular Chinese army. Each April—this year it was the fifth of the month—they came to Sianfu to take part in the traditional pilgrimage to the graves of the Jo Emperors just outside the city. It was the custom to pay homage to one's ancestors this day. Sianfu profited, because actually the Jo Emperors were not known to have been very prolific, yet there were thousands of homage-paying sons.

"Many of the warlords here today," explained the Minister of Pacification, "were once nothing but poor bandits without ancestors. Now they have ancestors. They bought themselves ancestors."

"You wish to buy an ancestor, a Jo Emperor perhaps?" the Civil Governor suggested to Quinto. "It will give you much face."

"Has Wang the Banker such ancestors?" asked Quinto.

"Wang has two sets of ancestors," replied the governor as though he himself were impressed. "Wang has his own family ancestors, the Liangs, and he bought into the Jo family."

"The Jo name is expensive, isn't it?"

"*Ayi!* Wang is rich. He pays."

Teng Fa lifted his glass and looked through it. "Would you be interested," he spoke blandly, "if Wang and Mr. Wier had private bank accounts in a French bank in Hankow?"

"Banque du Chine Centrale?" queried Quinto.

Teng's boyish face fell. "You already know, so why should I tell you?"

"How much?"

"In new deposits, 750,000 francs."

"Each?"

"No. Both together, with Wang having the larger account."

"Were the deposits made in francs?"

"Chinese dollars."

Suddenly Quinto rose from his chair and towered above the table. His gaze leaped across the crowded bar-room to where a man in a yellow trench coat stood in the doorway. The man looked in at the bar, hesitated, then turned and retreated hastily through the hotel lobby.

Quinto pushed through the crowded bar toward the door. On his way, he bumped into a civil official, bowled the man over and rushed on into the lobby. A flash of yellow gabardine whisked behind a swinging door marked—*Men*. In the lobby a swath of startled spectators marked Quinto's progress. He rushed into the lavendar tiled cubicle and halted. The place was empty! Through an open window he caught the last glimpse of Mr. Yellow Coat disappearing in the crowded street outside.

"This can't go on," he fumed, returning to the lobby. "Everyone disappearing right under my nose."

"Mista Qui'to—?" A Shensi coolie stood in Quinto's way, bowing. "Beg to tell honorable gentlemens Qui'to two piece missy kidnapped," he sang.

Quinto grabbed for the coolie as the latter darted away. He jerked the shivering messenger back and held him, squirming, a foot off the floor.

"Kidnapped! Which missy?"

"*Hsiaochieh* missy, foreign missy," the coolie gulped.

"Virtue and Woodford! Who kidnapped them?"

"Min-t'uan!"

"And the funny little fat man who was with them? The American?" Quinto demanded.

JOHN TATE lifted his head tentatively, then let it bump back upon the stone floor. It felt as if someone had driven spikes through it then poured liquid lead through the holes. The lead was now seeping into the crevices of his brain.

He wondered how long he had been unconscious. It could have been days, or only hours. He knew one thing at least. He was alone. Mountain of Virtue, Miss Woodford and the blinking bandit faces were gone. . . . But where?

Now his right arm hurt and it felt worse than his head because it tickled instead of ached. He craned his neck at an angle and moaned at what he saw. His arms were crossed in front. Coils of heavy rope had been wound about his middle. Something tasting like a fistful of mud had been crammed into his mouth.

Tate considered his position, then for fifteen minutes he struggled. Gritting his teeth to hold back the pain in his right arm, he finally balanced himself upright against a museum case, managed to overturn it with a clatter of broken glass. A museum guard came on the run.

When Tate finally got back to the Guest House it was mid-afternoon. He found Gimiendo Quinto in the street mounted on a sturdy little Mongol pony. There were more ponies on the hotel steps, and most of Quinto's guerrilla students who, it turned out later, had been summoned from Lingtung. Some of the students had white horses which, after the Chinese fashion, were dyed green or clay-red for camouflage purposes.

"Quinto—good God!" Tate plunged into an explanation of his adventures.

"Never mind, *compañero*," replied the Mexican. "I know that the señoritas were kidnapped." He grasped Tate's good arm and hoisted him to a spare pony. Then his hand swept eloquently toward the broken line of savage mountains to the south. The Bandit Mountains. "We are going to chase the Min-t'uan. *Vayamos pronto*."

Quinto seemed very satisfied with everything in general as he and Tate and the little band of guerrilleros rode into the dry, dusty Bandit Mountains. With each mile his satisfaction seemed to increase and by the morning of the second day, as they rode through a sun-baked canyon, passing beneath sheer precipices of tawny rock, Quinto positively glowed with pleasure over his indulgence in physical action.

"I am much more at home in the saddle," he announced. "I hate this business of questioning people in the manner of an English detective. We've had enough

for a few days. Now that we have action, we'll come quickly to a solution of our problems."

Tate could just imagine the Mexican approaching a solution aboard his Mongol pony. His eyes paused in momentary admiration of Quinto's equipment. The latter wore a crossed bandoleer of bullets across his barrel chest. There was a sinister two-edged axe and a coiled horsehair lariat on his saddle. Quinto himself wore an automatic and a saber. Beneath his cotton jacket a shirt of light, steel mesh was visible.

"I wear the mail," Quinto explained, "because I am so large bullets always get in my way."

Unlike Tate, he rode easily. He sat erect in his carved saddle, his body swaying in almost uncanny unity with the measured pace of his sturdy little mount. Sometimes he hummed as he rode. He was taking the loss of Virtue as he always took her—philosophically. Kidnapping was something not beyond his ability to repair. He stopped humming to lightly sing his favorite song—the campaign song of cousin Pancho.

La cucaracha, La cucaracha,
Ya no puede caminar
Si lo no tiene, si lo no tiene,
Uno gusto a luchar.

JOHN TATE rode with less assurance, although the Mongol ponies were easy to manage in the Shensi dialect. Upon leaving the Guest House, the afternoon before, he had placed himself in Quinto's hands without reserve. Now he was a little doubtful. What could twenty guerrilleros and two foreigners do in the Bandit Mountains?

"Perhaps that farmer back at Lan-tien was lying," he murmured for the tenth time.

"*Porque?*" asked Quinto. "Didn't he say the Min-t'uan men passed there with a foreign lady who complained bitterly about garlic in the food? Señorita Woodford, naturally."

"But was it the truth?" Tate protested weakly. "The information only cost us five *tael*."

"Peasants never charge the Republic's guerrilleros the usual tourist prices."

"I thought there were no bandits," said Tate.

"There aren't. Bandits are honest men making a living in a way not quite bona fide but often necessary. The Min-t'uan aren't bandits. Sometimes they are rich men's sons who band together to suppress peasants. Sometimes they are only hired by rich men."

"Wang's, I suppose?"

Sergeant Ping reined his horse up beside Quinto. He pointed toward the canyon back-trail where a cloud of yellowish dust bloomed.

"We're being followed," he announced.

"Good," answered Quinto. "You know the strategy."

"Perfectly."

Ping saluted and curbed his horse. Quinto stood in his stirrups and shouted: "Prepare for battle!"

"Where?" asked Tate nervously.

There was a certain eagerness showing in Quinto's eyes as he stared at something in the canyon up ahead. The something caused Tate to draw his breath in sharply. He saw a wisp of smoke curling up the canyon wall.

"Surrounded!" Quinto observed calmly.

A detachment of men under Ping's command swerved off into a small box arroyo while Quinto, Tate and seven remaining guerrilleros spurred on toward the smoke.

"What do we do now?" Tate asked.

"A little maneuvering, *nada mas*. You are about to see my own variation of Cousin Pancho Villa's feint attack. Mine is called, *On being led into a trap and turning tables*."

"Will there be fighting?" Tate glanced at his useless right arm.

"Oh, nothing but a short formal fight."

Quinto spurred his pony forward at a faster clip. *La Cucaracha* rollicked on his lips, inaudible two yards away. Tate felt his own mount almost swept from under him as the guerrilleros raced after Quinto. They rode like a band of charging Moors, shouting and brandishing rifles overhead. Suddenly the entire company plunged into a hollow where Min-t'uan men poked guns out from behind a dozen rocks.

Almost instantly, another band of mounted Min-t'uan riders spurred up from behind, surrounding the guerrilleros. Tate managed to cling to his saddle while rifles and pistols spat at him from all sides. A bullet zinged past his ear, flicking off a tuft of hair. Min-t'uan riders and guerrilleros criss-crossed on every side. The din of battle grew terrific as well as heroic.

Then Tate noticed something strange. For all the bullets and noise, not one man fell off his horse. Not a single horse whinnied in pain or fright. There were no gasps and screams from wounded men, only shrilly shouted war-cries and

Suddenly she was in Nevada's arms, clinging to him desperately.

the calling out of popular Chinese propaganda slogans. All at once it became clear . . . The guerrilleros and the Min-t'uan men were firing madly into the sky! Everyone was having a wonderful time. It was a sham battle.

Then, strangely, Quinto waved a white flag.

The shooting and noise abruptly subsided. A squat, swarthy-faced brigand with sympathetic eyes, obviously the leader of the Min-t'uan, rode up to the Mexican. Both men dismounted.

"We concede to a superior force," Quinto smiled.

The Min-t'uan chief saluted, then bowed.

"But we should be honored to concede victory to your superior cunning, generalship and bravery," he apologized.

Quinto lifted a deprecating hand. "But the honor is ours," he murmured.

"You are a great general!" The Min-t'uan chief bowed again, for it was seldom that a foreigner understood the subtleties of the traditional Chinese battle in which no one gets hurt and the army making the most noise or display of force is granted victory.

He turned to his brigands and gave out orders in a soft, sibilant voice. "The foreigner, we will release. The others will concede to becoming our prisoners." Then he glanced appraisingly at Quinto's guerrilleros. Something made him amend his plan. "On second thought," he said, glancing at Quinto, "the soldiers appear to have small value. Perhaps I will keep only the little pink-eyed man with the wrapped up arm. Has he value?"

"Much value," Quinto answered. "Señor Tate is my second most valued treasure."

"Good then, I'll keep him. You may do us the honor of being go-between for the kidnap reward?"

Quinto nodded in affirmation.

NEVADA looked steadily at Mary Wier as she stood in the sunlight on the bridge spanning the canal in the Lingtung Pavilions gardens. The girl's eyes seemed to avoid his even before he spoke.

"Mary—" Nevada hesitated.

"What?"

The cowboy scraped the toe of his boot in the gravel path. "Mary, after the funeral for Harrow and Firth, I'm leaving Lingtung. This afternoon. I'm going to the front."

A surprised, hurt look came into her eyes. "Why, Nevada?"

"I can't stay here. I'm getting too mixed up."

"I don't want you to go."

"You don't?" Nevada grinned delightedly.

"No. Don't go," Mary repeated softly.

"Mary—will you marry me?"

For an instant the girl turned away. Two small tears welled from her eyes. There was a moment of silence. Suddenly she was in his arms, clinging to him desperately. "I do love you," she cried softly. "I do, really. But I told you, I can't marry you. I can't . . . that's all."

Nevada's arms relaxed. His lips set in a thin line. "I don't get it," he said slowly.

"I can't marry you the way things are here. Oh, don't ask me to explain. If you understood you wouldn't ask me to marry you. Don't look at me that way, please!"

Nevada's eyes narrowed and grew hard. There came a vivid flash in his memory. The picture of Mary in the garden the afternoon Harrow had been murdered. The uneasy suspicion which he had put aside, now festered in his mind.

"Mary! What was there between you and Firth?"

"There was nothing!"

"You're lying."

"Nevada, please."

"What was it? Did you—"

The girl's eyes widened with terror and her hand went to her lips as though to stop her voice. "I didn't! He was dead when I went to his room! Believe me!" she screamed hysterically.

"You went to his room? That night?" Nevada gasped.

"You don't understand, Nevada. I'll explain. Please let me."

Abruptly there was a crack. Mary's doll-like head snapped to one side. Her blond hair shook out loosely. Then she crumpled to the garden path.

Nevada stared at her, fascinated and

bewildered. He had never knocked a woman out before. His girl! Suddenly he turned away. "I'm a damn fool," he muttered.

TATE shot Quinto a baleful, protesting glance. His eyes grew alternately wide and small, like those of a squid. "You're not going to leave me here with these bandits?" he cried. "But Quinto—"

Quinto smiled warmly and said nothing. He calmly studied the hands of his noisy Ingersoll watch. After a few minutes the watch went back in his pocket and he suddenly clapped both hands. The sound came like a rifle report, echoing in the canyon hollow.

The signal brought dismay among the Min-t'uan men for from behind a dozen rocks and boulders Sergeant Ping and the contingent of guerrilleros who had hidden in a box canyon until Quinto's group was surrounded, now stepped forth with leveled rifles. There came a businesslike click of bolts jamming cartridges into breeches. Ping's men displayed superb efficiency in surrounding and disarming the Min-t'uan whose leader, meanwhile, flashed Quinto a hurt look. This, indeed, was no Chinese tactic.

Quinto bowed apologetically, murmuring: "I am so sorry but now, suddenly, I appear to have the superior force."

He calmly fished in his pocket for some loose shreds of tobacco, rolled a cigarette and stuck it between his smiling lips. "Very simple," he added, still speaking to the Min-t'uan chief. "We capture you by turning tables. Now you must lead us to the hideout where the beautiful Shan Te and Señorita Woodford are being held. I am clever, no?"

The Min-t'uan chief shook his head. "I am miserably sorry, but you can't do it," he said. "I admire your tactics, yet they are entirely impossible. You must release us at once."

"Release you—bandits!" Tate cut in, his courage having suddenly returned along with Sergeant Ping. "Are you mad?"

Quinto stepped between Tate and the chieftain. "*Compañero!* Less vehemence, please. We must observe the rules and strategy of political compromise," he said reprovingly.

"That's right," said the Min-t'uan leader. "The rules of *yu shih wu ming.*"

"I propose an honorable deal in order to increase your face among your brethren," said Quinto.

The chieftain bowed. He waited attentively.

"First," continued Quinto, "you lead us to Mountain of Virtue whom you might know as Shan Te. Also, there is an English woman. Then we'll release you. There'll be a reward of course. The reward is for Mountain of Virtue."

"One does not quite see the direction," murmured the chieftain.

Quinto's hand dug into his pocket and he brought out a fistful of Chinese money. "May I improve your sight," he suggested blandly. "Sun Yat Sen dollars. Very good."

The chieftain shook his head sadly. "This is a most delicate question," he explained. "If I take you to the beautiful lady there will undoubtedly be great fighting over her. This cannot be risked. Mountain of Virtue might be harmed and she is far too beautiful to have tragedy befall her. A *hsiaochieh* woman is rare in China today!"

Quinto beamed appreciatively through the film of smoke curling from his lips. He nodded slowly, acknowledging the delicacy and understanding of the Min-t'uan leader.

"Careless of me," he muttered.

"You must allow yourself to be recaptured and returned to Lingtung," insisted the chieftain. "I give personal guarantee that comfort and service will be rendered the beautiful lady. And another thing—to make the deal more worthy and just, I beg one service of you."

"Granted," said Quinto. "What?"

"For good measure, I'll throw in the long-nosed foreign woman. She is much too difficult for us to manage. She requires the iron hand of a foreign male. You will do this?"

"It's asking much," Quinto countered.

"I'll pay you. Five hundred dollars, Chinese," the chieftain offered hastily.

"Very well." Quinto accepted the money, stuffed it into his jacket pocket.

THE CHIEFTAIN, his face now glowing with relief and goodfellowship, ordered one of his men to cart Mildred Woodford from a nearby cave where she was being held.

"It won't do to search for Mountain of Virtue in the same cave. She is not there," he told Quinto.

"But where is she?"

"Right now, my mind is blank."

"Could it be enlightened?"

"Possibly."

"And the conditions?"

"Another deal," suggested the chieftain. "You, honorable Captain, the pink-eyed man and the long-nosed woman must concede to recapture. My men will escort you to Lingtung. When you agree, I am in a mood to be enlightened."

"It's a deal," replied Quinto. "How much enlightenment?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"Chinese?"

"Good enough," shrugged the other.

Quinto took the five hundred dollars which he had received a moment earlier and returned it to the Min-t'uan chieftain.

He realized, with satisfaction, that the negotiations had been quite inexpensive on the whole.

"Now, the whereabouts of Virtue?" he demanded.

"The village of Honan in the Loess regions."

For the first time during the negotiations, Tate noticed his companion lose some of his self-assurance. The big man's features clouded and his dismay was nothing less than eloquent.

"Virtue is in Honan?" he asked unbelievingly.

The chieftain nodded. "Yes, in the Loess Lands to the east. After the kidnapping in the Pei-Lin, our party split. I carried the long-nosed foreigner here. Others, moving by fast automobile, took the beautiful lady to Honan."

The clatter of unshod pony hoofs echoed among the rocks. The Min-t'uan man who had been sent after Mildred Woodford, rode into sight. Mildred rode on a second pony. Her hands were tied behind her back and there was a rope coiled about her neck. The Min-t'uan rider held the end.

Mildred was not a particularly pretty sight for her mouth and lips were pinched as though she had sucked a dozen lemons.

Although her face was beet red with anger, she appeared absolutely incapable of speech.

"Her mouth will improve in a few days," the Min-t'uan chieftain explained. "She made me so much trouble I had to gag her with an unripe persimmon. It was most effective."

Quintó mounted his pony and taking the noose from Woodford's neck, prepared to depart. "*Vayamos*," he cried. "Tell Wang I shall have his ears for the taking of Virtue," he added, waving cheerfully at the chieftain.

The band of twenty Lingtung guerrilleros rode ahead, escorted by three Min-t'uan guards. Quinto followed beside Tate. Mildred Woodford bumped along, ahead.

She was still unable to speak coherently, much to everyone's relief.

After a little while, Tate observed that the party of guerrilleros had mysteriously dwindled to seventeen. Ping and two men had disappeared. The guards were gone too!

"It's strange," he said. "I could swear I saw Ping riding off with us?"

Quinto smiled confidentially. "Ping and the two *chicos* joined the Min-t'uan," he explained. "Very efficient, no? Not a sound. They overcame the guards at the last turn in the canyon. They are now wearing Min-t'uan clothes. It's part of our strategy. They'll find Virtue and bring me word whether she desires to be rescued."

"I don't see why you didn't arrest all the Min-t'uan and have it done with?"

"That wouldn't be *hanyan*."

"Why?"

"Well, you understand. The essence of good Chinese strategy is *hanyan*. When you see two enemy generals ride together as friends, that is *hanyan*. It is the art of not pressing your enemy to the wall, or not taking too much advantage. Thus the enemy, through knowing you better, is eventually impressed by your superior cunning."

CHAPTER XIII

WHISKEY AND WATER

EARLY in the morning of the day following Mildred Woodford's rescue, Tate went in search of Mary Wier. He found her and Sergeant Sun admiring a young, dwarf plum tree that had just flowered. A flavor of powdery pollen filled the little brick guardhouse and Sun was inordinately proud.

"I make him grow since baby," he crowed.

Surreptitiously, Tate glanced at Mary's jaw for he had already heard of the affair with Nevada. He could see the slight swelling and felt suddenly sorry for her.

"Miss Wier," Tate called.

Mary looked around forlornly.

"G.H.Q., is back," Tate told her. "He wants to see you in the office."

"Now?"

"Yes. He's waiting."

A minute later Tate opened the door of the *yamen* and let Mary precede him. His pinkish eyes still held her in half pitying, half curious scrutiny as she sank into a chair Quinto offered her.

"A drink! Can I get you a drink?"

"No thank you, Mr. Tate."

The girl's somber eyes looked inquiringly at Quinto who had seated himself on a stool, directly opposite her. Tate watched the entire business intently for he had a premonition that the big Mexican never questioned anyone unless something came of it.

Quinto's start was something disappointing. "Señorita," he said gently, "I want you to answer a few questions. No. Don't be frightened. You must not imagine me as big and terrible. You know, once I was very small. I only weighed eight pounds." He grinned. "You should not be afraid of me."

Mary drew back startled. "What do you want?" she asked.

"Some answers. Some truth. *Comprende?*"

"But what?"

Quinto favored her with a friendly smile. "Señor Nevada is my friend," he began. "I want you to tell me why he struck you. You wouldn't say he made a habit of hitting girls, eh?"

A tiny thread of terror flamed in Mary's eyes. She shook her head.

"You make me feel like a beast," said Quinto and he patted her hand. "Now, Nevada loves you, doesn't he? Your eyes show something of the same feeling for him. Am I right?"

"It's all over. He's gone," said Mary.

"Yes, he has gone. You're afraid he won't return. You want him back—"

"Please!" Mary cried.

"What did you say to him to make him go? Did you suspect Nevada murdered Señor Firth? Did—"

"No . . . no . . . not Nevada!"

"Why did he hit you?" Quinto pressed her hand, reassuringly. "You must tell me," he murmured. "There must be nothing hidden."

"I-I-I told him. . . ."

"Yes, I'm listening?"

The girl bit her lower lip and a little drop of blood oozed upon it. Finally the dam within released a torrent of confession. "Nevada didn't mean to strike me," she cried. "I made him do it. Yes, I made him. I said I was in Clive's room the night. . . ."

"The night he was murdered!" Tate cut in. He had pounced upon the word like an animal stalking its prey.

"You were in the room!" said Quinto. "At which hour?"

"I don't know," replied Mary.

"Try and remember."

"It was after midnight. It was between twelve thirty and one o'clock. It was so terrible I didn't think of the time."

"And Señor Clive was dead?"

"Yes. In the chair."

Quinto sat back, resuming his former placidity which he had dropped for a moment. He took time to roll himself a cigarette and light it. "Now," he continued. "Something very important. Tell me exactly what you saw. You went there after twelve thirty. Señor Clive was dead? He was sitting in the chair opposite the window?"

"He was in the chair," Mary said slowly. "I thought he was sleeping, he was so still. His back was to the door. Then I faced him and saw the blood on

the front of his shirt. I was terrified."

"And what did you do?"

"I ran out."

"Did you shut the door?"

"I . . . I think I left it open."

"Were there papers on the floor? Did the room appear to have been searched?"

"No. It was as neat as usual. Clive was very orderly."

"So, you've been in Señor Clive's room before?"

The girl's eyes widened. "Yes, I've been there."

"Midnight is a strange time to visit a single man, isn't it?"

"I had to see him."

"Why?"

The girl's lips tightened. There came a moment of uneasy silence. Quinto waited patiently, his gaze pausing upon a popular slogan tacked to his wall—*Give us back our mountains and rivers.*

Suddenly his voice clipped forth with unusual sharpness. It caught Tate unaware and it made Mary turn deathly pale. "Did your visit with Firth have something to do with a visit you intended to pay Wang the night of the murder?"

Mary shook her head quickly. "I went to see Wang because he was bothering my father," she said.

"Why was he bothering him?"

"I don't know."

"This brings me to the last question," said Quinto. "Now, perhaps, you thought Firth killed Harrow. At supper, exactly five days ago, the evening of the murder, Firth said he hadn't killed Harrow. After that, whom did you suspect? Whom do you suspect now?"

"No one. I haven't even thought about it," she said. Her fingers were clenched.

Tate stared at Mary, then at Quinto as the latter rose from his chair. He wondered if the Mexican had the same impression he did—that the girl was lying!

WHEN Mary Wier had gone, Quinto summoned the officer of the day and sent him in search of Lieutenant Chi. Then he faced Tate, asking: "What do you think?"

"About Mary? Well, if you ask me, she's trying to protect someone," Tate replied thoughtfully.

Quinto listened indifferently. He gargled noisily with a mouthful of brandy, spat it out the window and began eating a solid triangular gob of gelatinous rice stuffed with ham and pork—a dish poetically entitled *tsungtse.*

"I wouldn't know whom she's protecting," Tate continued. "Perhaps her father. Perhaps Nevada. It's interesting, the fact that he knocked her out, then left Lingtung without even an army pass. Had he something to do with the murders?"

The door opened and Lieutenant Chi entered. He tapped his bandaged head in a smart salute. His two-tone shoes were brightly polished, his plus fours were neatly creased along the seams and he wore a golfer's suede jacket.

"Japanese Colonel Nohuri has been captured," said Chi. "The guerrilleros put the finger on him in his staff headquarters across the river."

"Very good," Quinto murmured.

Chi clicked his heels and handed him a large coil of gold braid; at least a dozen yards of the stuff generals drape themselves with.

"Gold braid from Colonel Nohuri's Sunday uniform," he explained. "The guerrilleros sent it back because it might be valuable to China."

"When does Nohuri come?" Tate put in.

Chi's eyes twinkled. "Our men captured Nohuri in enemy territory. They also captured Colonel Nohuri's staff headquarters. He is being held prisoner there. The colonel will naturally feel more at home in his headquarters and will feel freer to speak on the cipher messages than if he were brought to Lingtung."

"*Olay,*" said Quinto, mainly for Tate's benefit. "You see. My guerrilleros think things out. They observe the finer distinctions."

"It's fantastic," Tate murmured.

Quinto ignored the remark and turned again to Lieutenant Chi. "*Teniente,*" he said. "Today I want a thorough search made of Running Wind Mountain. Fine-comb it, especially the lower

escarpment where Harrow was murdered. I expect you to bring something back."

"Something big or something little?" asked Chi.

"Look for both. Something is still missing from the Harrow picture."

After the lieutenant had gone, Quinto moved toward the window and stared reflectively at the cypress beyond the frame.

"Señor Tate, you've been in Lingtung five days. You already know the people, yet you can look at them as an outsider. What do you think of the case?"

Tate looked up, somewhat pleased to have his opinion asked for. "Well, I think it's a muddle," he answered. "However, considering all that's happened and all we know, I suppose it's just one of those crimes you can't boil down to proofs. Wang was in touch with the Japanese. I think he was a spy and that Harrow worked under him. Firth discovered it and killed him. That threw a fright into Wang. If you ask me, Wang is Firth's murderer."

"Then why is Mignon Chauvet upset about Mr. Yellow Coat? Why is Mary Wier hiding something? Where are all the why's?" asked Quinto.

"I forgot about that."

"You see our trouble," Quinto observed pointedly. "The murders are surrounded by debris. It's time I began clearing and straightening out our mysteries. *Primero*—we examined alibis connected with Señor Abe's death. The alibi is less important than character, remember, but here it may aid in the solution of the second murder. I can't begin on Firth's murder until I completely understand what happened on the mountain."

He suddenly stared down the shaft of the cigarette slanting from his lips and pointing at Tate like a gun. "Do you know how Harrow was murdered?" he asked.

Tate looked bewildered. "Who? Me?"

"Forget it." Quinto smiled. "Let us consider alibis for a moment. For instance . . . Mary Wier. . . . Where was she between 10:20 and 12:30, the morning and noon of the day Harrow died? *Sargento* Sun reports she was in the garden at noon. Obviously she wasn't on the mountain when Harrow died at 11:50. . . .

"Mr. Ho. I saw him in Lingtung shortly before noon. McKay was in town with me. Virtue, Miss Woodford and yourself were on the Lunghai Express at 11:50 and didn't arrive until shortly after midday. Whom have we left? Wang—he was on the mountain. Where?" Quinto shrugged his shoulders eloquently. "We don't know. From Chi's description, Wang appeared near the cave sometime after midday, only a few minutes after Señor Clive Firth followed Papa Wier and Mr. Yellow Coat down the mountain.

"Now, Nevada was climbing also, but Sun reports he returned to the garden by 12:30. Mignon Chauvet was at the Pavilion the entire day. However, we must take her word for this. The guerrilleros are all accounted for. They were on the firing range except for one sick man and the officer of the day."

Quinto rubbed his jaw and went off on a new tangent. "Now consider motive," he said thoughtfully. "Papa Wier hated Harrow—the kidnapping incident at Ping Ying. Señorita Chauvet hated Harrow for possible blackmail. Nevada's dislike is in the same class as that of McKay, Firth, myself, Lieutenant Chi and Sun. We looked upon Señor Abe as a traitor to China. Mr. Ho cared little for Harrow because he was a foreigner. Wang the Banker—I would like to know his motive. Had he one?"

"Was Abe Harrow double crossing him, perhaps?" Tate asked.

"There are still one or two considerations which give might rise to new motives," Quinto murmured. "For example, did Señor Firth have some very important information we know nothing of?"

"About the meeting in the cave?" asked Tate.

"Possibly that he knew who killed Harrow!"

"But you talked with him after supper that evening?"

"*Seguro*. But after supper he was assigned to check up alibis as we've just done. Did he discover something we've missed?"

"What gives you that idea?"

"His room was searched, wasn't it? Why should someone ransack his quarters? Here's a motive without an owner. The point to remember is, that the room was searched by someone who came after he was murdered! First, there was the killer, then Mary Wier who observed that the place had not been searched, finally the searcher. With this, I can establish the time of Señor Clive's death. It was between midnight and 12:30 or shortly after—if Señorita Wier told us the truth. If she didn't, it might mean she was also the searcher. It might also mean. . . ."

"That she murdered Firth!" put in Tate.

THE pinched taste of unripe persimmons in Mildred Woodford's mouth slowly yielded to the cheerful flavor of cognac loaned by G.H.Q. She felt definitely herself again as she polished off the last half of the bottle just for precaution.

With a sigh of regret, she finally tossed the empty fifth behind the pink brick guard-house then, arming herself with her saddlebag purse and leatherette notebook, she tackled the sergeant of the guard.

For almost five days she had grown frantic in an attempt to get the lay of the land. Success had not been altogether lacking. Her black notebook was crammed with dynamite. She, of all the people in Lingtung, knew who had murdered Clive Firth. Now she wanted details on Harrow. Such details, properly colored, would make a story, a scoop!

But in the case of Harrow all her questions were met by a wall of bland innocence. This time she hoped her strategy would work for she now offered Sergeant Sun a sizable bribe of one pound thrupence.

Sun immediately felt that one English pound was worth a lot more murders than Harrow alone so he promptly furnished Mildred with all the lurid details of the murder and quartering of 25,000 Manchus in Sianfu a dozen years back. For the extra thrupence he tossed in details on the three million souls killed by typhus during the 1921 Northwest famine.

Like any good journalist, whose bribes have bought nothing but circumlocution, Mildred promptly stormed off to Lingtung, refilled on a half dozen local sherries at the teahouse, then appeared at the railway telegraph office with two prepared messages.

"I'm going to get this story out if I have to plot the rest of the details myself," she muttered defiantly as she handed in her two messages.

The station master, a gray-headed rogue with yellowish eyes, studied the messages carefully for a full five minutes. Finally, with crooked teeth showing through an insecure smile, he asked in tolerable English: "What speech these written in?"

"English," replied Mildred with proper British scorn for the illiterate.

The station master made a polite, bowing gesture. "Gotta getum censor," he said.

"Censor!" yapped Mildred. "I say now, must you even censor birthday greetings?"

"Birthday greetin gotta censor . . . Funeral greetin gotta censor," replied the master in all simplicity.

"Really, old chap, that's dashed inconvenient. You've my word for it. These telegrams are strictly sweet," Mildred changed her tone, speaking with almost inane cheerfulness.

"Gotum censor."

"Really? Where's the censor?"

"Me callum."

"Well, then, do it quickly."

The station master had already picked up the phone. As usual, he was put in touch with Hankow and Kaifeng alternately, then he got the Lingtung number he wanted. What followed was in such rapid fire Chinese that Mildred thought he was singing in the phone.

The old man hung up and turned toward Mildred pleasantly. "Come backee hour," he said. "Censor say he come chopping chop. Gotta eat. Gotta shave first. Me keep messages."

"Chop chop," Mildred repeated with profound British humor. "I hope he chops himself."

Mildred paraded about Lingtung for an hour, from one cafe to another. She liked the sight of men in cafes, even though they were Chinese, and she fancied they liked her. She did indeed look rather well for she wore a sleek, cream-colored sport dress instead of the usual B.E.F. tweeds. The dress had wowed Hankow when she wore it there. She figured it would have the same effect in Lingtung.

The hour gone, she returned to the railroad station utterly confident that she could sway the censor if he had an eye for clothes at all. The censor, naturally, would be Chinese. If Mildred had known that the Chinese seldom grow hair on their chins and consequently don't shave, her confidence would have been less secure.

It was only after she entered the station that her lobster pink face fell in dismay. The familiar, picaresque figure of G.H.Q. loomed before her like a foreboding mountain. To one side, the station master blinked whimsically and pointed at the Mexican mountain.

"Him censor," he simmered.

"It's preposterous!" Mildred sputtered.

"It's a fact," Quinto grinned.

Mildred threw what hips she had about and stamped upon the floor angrily. "I say, old fruit, I'm dashed sick of it," she cried. "It's dictatorship, really. Every time I go places, you crowd in. Am I to be pinched now?"

Quinto armored himself with a pleasant smile. "I'm so sorry," he murmured.

"You sorry! Fancy that?"

"Your telegrams are very clever," Quinto mused, picking up the forms. "Do you always send birthday greetings to the New York and the London *Times*?"

He held the cable addressed to the New York *Times* in his right hand. It read:

EDITORIAL
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, U.S.A.
ABE HARROW AMER OFFICER CHI ARMY MYSTERIOUSLY MURDERED HERE BEHIND LINES. C. FIRTH BRITISH DEAD SELF KIDNAPPED WANT STORY CABLE RATES WORDS POSSIBLE WAVE OF MURDERS AMONG FOREIGNERS WOODFORD LINGTUNG

"Now, see here," Mildred blustered, pushing the cable aside, "if my messages are cut one word I'll see that the British Embassy and the Press Delegation in Hankow hear of it, really I shall!"

Quinto scratched himself and grinned. "But my dear Señorita," he murmured, "I had every intention of passing your cables through. It was but my duty to read, not to stop your messages. I see nothing wrong in them, so *mira*. . . ." With a magnificent flourish, he handed the uncut messages to the station master. "Send them," he directed.

Mildred shot him a funny look and said, "Oh!"

"We must have a drink on that," Quinto observed as he gallantly took her arm.

"I say, that's jolly good of you, old fruit. You don't mind me calling you that, do you?"

A DOZEN drinks later, Mildred experienced a certain warm feeling in her heart for the huge, carelessly dressed Mexican. Her pink face glowed with cheerfulness while her gaze meandered idly over the crimson furnishings of the tiny teahouse where they drank. The tinkling voice of a sing-song girl ran an exotic scale to the accompaniment of a four-stringed moon guitar.

Her glance returned to the table and Quinto. "Gad, Quinto! You drink like a gentleman," she gurgled in an intimate mood. "Not a bad sort at all, you know. Really, you do drink!"

"Ah. But you should see Virtue drink —like a queen."

"Really, old fruit, I had you all wrong."

"So you did."

Mildred gazed upon her companion and sighed. At this moment Quinto appeared more like a parade of men, and parades were something which left Mildred limp with emotions of a vehement, irresponsible sort.

"Quinto," she said suddenly, "you look like a man who might be a match

for me. Really, I'll bet you I can drink you under the table!"

"A dog's head you can," Quinto challenged back.

"Five pounds. Put up."

"*Bueno.*" Quinto deposited a crumpled Chinese banknote, the equivalent of five British pounds, upon the tile table.

Mildred slipped the corner of a five pound note under a glass. At a signal from Quinto, the waiter rushed more metal teapots filled with liquor that tasted like *Bols*. Meanwhile both the Englishwoman and the Mexican settled themselves comfortably for it was seldom that either found anyone who could approach their respective saturation points.

By the fifteenth round, the teahouse customers and the sing-song girls sensed something unusual. They gathered around the table and watched eagerly. The drinking progressed professionally. As it passed the twenty-second and twenty-third rounds, the spectators hedged in closer. Here was a new kind of battle—dramatic and amazing. The Chinese men placed side bets.

For a while the wagering was heaviest on the foreign lady. She gained a good deal of face by tossing her whiskeys off neat and without a shudder. Nearing the twenty-fifth glass, odds shifted heavily to Quinto. He distinguished himself by drinking slowly, methodically, all the while humming a hilarious Mexican campaign song.

Two drinks later Mildred showed signs of sagging. She leaned her chin on the palm of one hand and ogled Quinto affably.

"I shay ole f-fruit," she murmured and shook her head so it fell from her palm. She brought it back up only after some difficulty. "I feel wunnerful, don't you?"

Quinto drew another glass, sipping it slowly while he frowned at Mildred's long shanks out beside the table. He was two drinks ahead now and was just getting to the point where he felt like really drinking. He almost hoped she wouldn't give up now.

"Wunnerful fella," crowed Mildred as she tipped her glass over. "Shent that ca-ble off dinnya? Wunnerful how I made you do it, ole f-f-fruit. Tricked you. Ha . . Ha . . Ha . ."

Quinto's whimsical laughter matched her own.

"*Olay, muy comico*, so funny." He grinned radiantly. "The coincidence—I did not tell you. Ah, I forgot. The telegraph lines broke down just before I gave the station master your cables."

Mildred giggled irrepressibly. "L-l-lines broke down," she laughed. "Wunnerful . . . Telephone poles tired, they fall down . . . Ha . . Ha . . Ha . ."

She swayed limply in her chair and worked desperately to fix her wandering blue eyes upon Quinto. She saw, somewhat vaguely, a dozen Quinto's rise from the table. There was a sing-song voice. She felt Quinto's firm arm about her waist. He was leading her away somewhere and she felt deliriously happy.

AN HOUR later Mildred Woodford came to her senses. The awakening occurred, not rudely, but with a pleasant awareness of liquid warmth. At length, a strong odor of garlic and onions, mixed with steam, assailed her nostrils. She felt strong arms holding her.

Forcing her eyes open, one at a time, she looked about aghast for she was sitting waist deep in water. Two grinning, naked peasant women were holding her upright and splashing water in her face.

"Amazons!" she gasped and promptly passed out again.

The Chinese women relaxed their grip but kept on laughing. Six or seven fat-bodied, noodle eating Northern women and a few assorted male and female children splashed around in the pool, giggling in open amusement.

Mildred opened her eyes again. The pool and the women were still there. "Where am I?" she asked frantically.

The peasant woman on her right chuckled. "Public bath . . . Me boss," she replied.

"The public bath! Oh, this is horrible!" Mildred made a desperate, confused attempt to collect her thoughts. She also gained a modicum of control.

"I say, dash it! It won't wash, you know. Where are my clothes? Get me my things, will you!"

"No got clothes," replied one of the Amazons—the boss.

"What do you mean, no got?"

"Cap'n Qui-to take all clothes. Say you maybe like stay bath couple day. He come back Monday."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. YELLOW COAT

G.H.Q. returned to the Pavilions at about three in the afternoon. He was none the worse for some twenty-nine glasses of whiskey. He entered his *yamen* and briskly set about transferring Mildred Woodford's cream sport dress, stockings and silk underthings to a hook behind the door. He surveyed the silks appreciatively, his mind momentarily thinking tender thoughts about Mountain of Virtue. Finally, with a deep sigh, he began examining the contents of Mildred's handbag.

Englishwomen were like most other women, he observed, as the collection of feminine nick-nacks grew upon his map table. The purse produced a fund of lip-rouge, face powder, a tube of camphor, mirrors, fountain pen, a wad of English banknotes big enough to choke a prime-minister, a comb and several hairpins.

Quinto glanced in her blue-covered passport and put it back. The picture was worse than usual.

Casually he paged through her leatherette notebook. It was filled out in diary form, interspersed with hastily drawn maps of unimportant military positions along the Chinese fronts. One page was devoted to bridge scores. Another to a sketch titled *Nevada*, but done in modern style and thoroughly unrecognizable. He felt a little hurt upon finding no picture of himself in the book.

He read through Mildred's record of the last six days and winced once or twice. Mildred had very strong opinions. Suddenly his eyes paused, then raced through one passage:

April 5th. A.M.

I've got my story! Beastly lucky. An American scoop for Mildred. Early this morning the unsuspecting Wiers argued within my hearing in the garden. I now know who murdered the Britisher, Firth! It was Mr. Wier!

Daughter Mary walked right in on the pater, in Firth's room, and found him with the gun. She hid the pistol in the ARP shelter where Mignon Chauvet found it later. The dutiful daughter protects her wayward pater. The Wiers may attempt to push off and all that. Wouldn't be surprised if they're gone when we return from Sianfu tonight. Will Quinto's face be red!

Quinto's mouth gaped a trifle as he re-read the passage. Then he snapped the book shut and called an orderly. "Escort Papa Wier here," he ordered curtly.

A moment later John Tate breezed through the doorway. His cheeks puffed out ruddily, his coat-tails fluttered and his bandaged arm stuck out like a stubby, white penguin's wing. "I've traced Nevada," he said exultantly. "He went off toward Kaifeng on a transport truck. Shall I call the military police in Kaifeng?"

"No," Quinto motioned calmly. "He'll return alone."

Tate looked astonished.

"Sit down," Quinto murmured. "I'm expecting Papa Wier. I have a feeling it will be a stormy session."

Tate relaxed and let his gaze wander around the room. His eyes came up with a start on Mildred Woodford's clothes neatly hung behind the door. "Say, what are you doing with Woodford's clothes? Where did she—" The question died on his lips as the door opened and Papa Wier entered.

Wier had changed a great deal in the last few days. He no longer had the appearance of a prim, chauvinistic, Old China Hand. He had aged overnight.

"Good afternoon," said Quinto as he waved a welcoming hand toward a chair. "Sit down please."

Papa Wier fumbled with the chair back. He sat down and laced his fingers nervously.

"Señor Wier, I understand you are planning to leave China?" Quinto began slowly.

Wier nodded.

"Why?"

The missionary spread his fingers in a helpless gesture. "Why shouldn't we? The Japanese occupied our mission. Nothing remains."

Quinto turned away casually. "Do the two murders have anything to do with your decision?"

Wier stiffened and flashed an agonizing glance at the Mexican's back. He made an effort to control himself, answered with forced brittleness: "Mr. Quinto, I didn't come here to be insulted or to be dragged into a murder scandal. I don't know what happened. Nothing at all."

Quinto suddenly faced the missionary. He looked gigantic and challenging. Wier's eyes faltered.

"Señor," Quinto spoke with staccato force, words shooting out like well aimed bullets, "you . . shot . . Clive . . Firth!"

"No!" It was a strangled gasp.

"It's too late to deny it," Quinto continued. "You shot Señor Clive. Your daughter, Mary, found you in the room, holding the gun. You shot him. You broke down. You were bewildered. Mary protected you. She hid the gun in the *refugio*. That much I know. Ah, yes, there is other proof. Do you recognize this?"

Quinto reached in a little box on his table and held up the heroin capsule found in Firth's room. Papa Wier glanced at it dully. He was huddled in his chair, his stiffness broken, his face drawn of color. He looked completely exhausted.

"I suspected you used heroin," said Quinto. "One night I saw your daughter, Mary, go to visit Wang. She knew you used heroin. She also knew Wang supplied you with it. But this is not our business at the moment. What I want to know is, why you murdered Firth."

"I-I-I didn't shoot him," Wier muttered. The words slipped forth with no breath behind them.

"Then explain the gun. Mary found you with it."

"Oh, it's no use," Wier protested despairingly. "You won't believe me. Mary doesn't believe me. There's really nothing left. Even my daughter doubts me."

QUINTO signaled to Tate who quickly filled a glass with cognac and brought it to the missionary. Wier looked at it vacantly and shook his head. "Never drink," he murmured.

"Every man to his own vice," Tate whispered almost inaudibly.

"Where did you get the gun that killed Firth?" Quinto repeated. "It was an expensive gun. One doesn't find those just anywhere."

"The gun?" Wier looked up blankly. "The gun? I found it in the room, on the table."

"Which room?"

"Firth's."

"You're telling me you shot him with his own gun?"

"No! No! He was already dead. He was dead when I came in. . . . Oh, what's the use?"

Tate looked at Quinto dubiously.

"You found Firth dead. Then what did you do?" asked Quinto.

"I can't remember what I did," Wier mumbled exasperatedly. "Perhaps I shot him. I don't know. No one will believe me so let me alone, will you!"

Quinto maneuvered his questions, patiently, yet firmly. "Why, in the first place, were you in Firth's room at midnight or later?"

"Because—because of my daughter."

"She shot him? Are you trying to cover her?"

A look of horror entered the man's eyes. "No! Not that," he pleaded. "I went because Mary had been visiting Firth. There was something between them. I can't say what. I don't know. But Mr. Firth wasn't the type of man for Mary. He was too hard, too ruthless."

"What was the condition of the room when you left?"

"I hardly remember."

"Was it ransacked?"

"No. I don't think so."

"By any chance, did you have another reason for visiting Firth? Could it be because Firth saw you on the mountain at the time Harrow was murdered? Were you afraid of what he might have seen?"

"Harrow?" Wier murmured. "No. I had nothing to do with Harrow."

"Nothing?" asked Quinto. His brow flicked up doubtfully. "I understand you left America under disagreeable circumstances many years back."

Wier sighed bitterly. "You know that too!"

"Naturally," said Quinto. "For the moment, I'm a detective. It's my business to know. I assure you, once we clear this case, I will forget everything. But now. . . ."

Again Quinto reached into the shoebox on the table. This time he brought forth the military pass which had been found in Harrow's room. He held the slip out and looked at Wier reprovingly. "After so many years you put your hand to practice again. You forged my name to this *salvo conducto,* the form which Harrow stole from my room."

"No. I didn't, really," Wier denied, but it was evident he was lying.

"Forgery is dangerous," Quinto went on blandly. "You must have been very friendly with Harrow?"

A loud blast from the exhaust of a motor car sounded from outside, drowning Wier's denial. Quinto stepped to the window, glanced out and then returned to Wier.

"You were to meet Harrow in the mountain cave, weren't you?" he asked. "You were with a man in a yellow raincoat, no? What do you know of Mr. Yellow Coat? Are you familiar with these names—Lin Tan, DuPont, Fu Tien, Harrow?"

Just then the door opened and Teng Fa entered, looking cheerful and very victorious. He was wearing the normal Chinese mufti with the exception of a white Mohammedan ceremonial fez for he had just returned from a flying trip into the *Ma* country.

"*Hola,* Teng!" Quinto beamed pleasantly.

Teng Fa glanced at Wier. "Business?" he asked.

"Come in," smiled Quinto.

The young secret service ace turned toward the door and motioned for someone to enter, then he grinned at Quinto, saying: "I arrested Mr. Yellow Coat! All this while he lived in the room adjoining my quarters at the Guest House. He was very clever. He seldom wore his coat. A fine camouflage so it took time to find him. Now . . . Mr. Yellow Coat. . . ."

TENG FA stepped aside as a man of medium build, with dark eyes, brows, and smooth pompadoured black hair entered the room. A long scar, curving thickly in the manner of a Turkish scimitar, extended from the lower lid of his right eye down to the base of his chin. He wore a yellowish gabardine trench coat into the pockets of which his hands were thrust. He looked cool and composed. His eyes flitted indifferently from Wier to Tate to Quinto. For a second, one hand came out of his pocket, put a cigarette in his mouth. He lit it and puffed vigorously.

"His papers," said Teng Fa, handing Quinto a large leather wallet. "Nothing irregular. He belonged to the same unit of the Ambulance Corps as Harrow."

"A doctor?" asked Quinto, shifting his gaze toward the man.

"*C'est ca,*" Yellow Coat grunted.

"I must go, Quinto," Teng Fa interrupted. "He's yours. I shall bring Wang, perhaps tomorrow, perhaps the next day. Good-bye." Teng saluted and left the room. A moment later the roar of his motor car rumbled through the gardens.

Quinto glanced through Mr. Yellow Coat's papers. "French, eh?" he murmured. Once or twice he arched his brows and again he voiced a bird-like little "*tsk.*" Finally, he stepped to the door and gave the attending officer instructions.

"And now," he began. He faced Mr. Yellow Coat and pulled himself to his full, overwhelming height, displaying most prominently his Order of the Blue Sky and White Sun. Then he introduced himself in rapid-fire French. "I am Gimiendo Hernandez Quinto!" It was like saying, "I am the president."

Mr. Yellow Coat stared back coldly. "*Sans blague.* I know that," he said.

Quinto smiled. "You know then. Very good." He now produced the Comblain derringer and held it in the palm of his hand for Mr. Yellow Coat to see. He watched the Frenchman's reactions

closely. "You recognize it?" he asked.

Mr. Yellow Coat blew a stream of smoke from his nostrils. *"Non, pas de tout,"* he answered brittlely.

"Naturally," replied Quinto. "Knowing what occurred in Lingtung, you would not recognize the gun. Foolish of me to ask such a question, eh?"

"Quite," answered Mr. Yellow Coat.

"Señor Yellow Coat, you have another name. A pseudonym. On Wang's books you are known as DuPont. Isn't it so?"

The shot told for the Frenchman flinched, though only for an instant.

"You shouldn't leave your pseudonym lying about in your wallet." Quinto smiled.

"Quite true."

"Do you receive or send codes in French?" Quinto asked abruptly.

"I speak French. Does that interest you?"

Quinto pointed toward Papa Wier who still sagged in his chair, gazing blankly at the door. "You met Papa Wier on the mountain five days ago. Why?"

"Which mountain?" The Frenchman curled his lips defiantly.

"Ah," Quinto murmured in admiration. "You are a cool one. Good. Let us begin earlier. What did Abe Harrow say to you the morning he was murdered?"

"Harrow?" Yellow Coat asked blankly.

Quinto shot him an exasperated glance. "Answer the questions," he commanded. The roll of his voice was heavy with annoyance. "Why were you on the mountain? Why did you return the second day? Why were you snooping near the garden walls the night Harrow was murdered? . . . Remain silent another instant and I'll return you to Teng Fa."

The Frenchman merely smiled and shrugged.

"You are very brave," Quinto observed for the threat of being handed over to Teng Fa would, in ordinary cases, bring a man to his knees.

"That's my affair," replied the Frenchman. He turned his gaze toward the door as it opened. Suddenly he stiffened.

Mignon Chauvet stepped in. The instant she saw Mr. Yellow Coat, she stopped. Her hand reached back toward the door frame for support. Her eyes were saucer-wide and there was a look of terror deep within them, as if she saw a ghost.

"Michel!" she gasped.

She turned to flee but Quinto quickly blocked the way.

"It's nothing, Señorita," he murmured reassuringly. *"It is nothing but your husband!"*

MIGNON rested on Quinto's bed. Her face was pale and and drawn. She avoided her husband's eyes and looked appealingly at Quinto. "Why is Michel here? How?" she asked weakly.

Mr. Yellow Coat gave his wife a cold,

Asthma Mucus Loosened First Day for Thousands

Do recurring attacks of Bronchial Asthma make you choke, strangle and gasp for breath? Are you bothered so bad some nights that you can't sleep? Do you cough and cough trying to raise thick strangling mucus, and strain so hard you fear rupture? Are some attacks so bad you feel weak, unable to work? Are you afraid of colds, exposure and certain foods?

No matter how long you have suffered or what you have tried, we believe there is good news and palliative hope for you in a splendid medicine which was originally a doctor's prescription but that is now available to sufferers at all drug stores under the name of Mendaco.

Mendaco usually works very rapidly because it contains ingredients intended to help nature loosen thick, strangling excess mucus. And you know from your own experience if you can just raise that strangling phlegm you can sleep well, breathe deeply of God's fresh air and not feel like there was an iron band around your chest crushing out your very life.

Money Back Guarantee

Mendaco is not a dope, smoke, injection or spray, but is in pleasant, tasteless tablets. Formula on every package. In fact Mendaco has proved such a great palliative success for thousands suffering recurring choking, strangling symptoms of Bronchial Asthma that a printed guarantee with each package insures an immediate refund of your money on return of empty package unless you are completely satisfied. Under this money back guarantee you have everything to gain and nothing to lose, so ask your druggist for Mendaco today and put it to the test. Only 60c.

ironic stare. *"Eh bien,"* he said icily. "So you're surprised. Yes, surprised to see me alive!"

"I'll explain," Quinto said. "Through Virtue I learned that Señorita Chauvet had shot her husband in Paris. She fled the country, thinking she had killed him. Instead, he is with us now. In Lingtung, the young lady fell deeply in love with Clive Firth, whose interest in her, she realized bitterly, was only passing. She had told Firth of her marriage to Chauvet and their argument, just before Clive's death, was about her wanting to marry him. When I overheard her say, that midnight, *'I must do it,'* or, *'I am not afraid to do it,'* she referred to clearing herself in France. She had shot Mr. Yellow Coat in self-defense. Isn't it so?"

He glanced at Mignon for confirmation. The girl nodded her head.

"Very well," Quinto continued. "The morning Sun described your husband, you reacted violently. You couldn't believe it was the same man. Still there was that possibility. On the other hand, Señor Chauvet had heard from Harrow that you were here. However, I don't think he cared. He was no longer interested in you. Of course, Harrow blackmailed you because Harrow couldn't ever resist taking a little money. He was like that.

"Now, how do I know that Señor Chauvet, alias Mr. Yellow Coat, alias DuPont had no interest in his wife? Simple. He had another reason for being around Lingtung—the same which sent Wang into Firth's room. Yes, the same reason that was to draw Wang, Papa Wier, Harrow to the cave for a meeting which did not materialize." Quinto stared straight at Mr. Yellow Coat. "You *were* to have an important meeting on the mountain, no?" he demanded.

"C'est mon affaire!" the Frenchman snapped.

"You were not in Firth's room," continued Quinto. "I am very sure of that, perhaps. There is no evidence. Also, you were a stranger and Firth's face was calm when he died. He died at the hand of a friend possibly."

"Well, what do you want then?" Chauvet demanded. "A confession?"

"Ah, no," murmured Quinto. "But at this very moment I'm much closer to recognizing who killed Harrow. The proof should be here any minute. Needless to say, you'll be held here under guard until that time."

Papa Wier suddenly stirred in his chair and looked at Quinto queerly. "What did you say?" he asked.

"Quinto! Look out!" Tate's warning rang out hoarsely.

For all his bulk, Quinto spun around and faced Michel Chauvet. He found himself staring into the bore of his own service pistol. In the instant while he had looked toward Papa Wier, the Frenchman had leaped to where Quinto's holster hung on a wall peg, drawing the gun. Now he waved the weapon warningly. There was a purposeful glint in his eyes. "Back! Over against the wall," he clipped. "Don't attempt to stop me. I'll shoot."

Quinto held his ground in his usual unruffled manner. In fact, he brightened at the challenge. "Ah, Señor Chauvet," he said. "The door is guarded. There's a guerrillero stationed outside. I think you'd better drop that gun."

Chauvet's face changed for an instant, flashing a sort of cold desperation. The scimitar scar under his eye grew livid. The Frenchman took his eyes off of those in the room for a bare second to glance toward the garden window.

Quinto closed in on him slowly. The cigarette in his mouth sent a curling line of smoke up toward eyes that failed to blink and were as cold as ice.

"Michel!" Mignon had found her voice for a single cry of terror.

The Frenchman hooked one leg over the windowsill. He balanced there and aimed the gun steadily at Quinto's head. "Back!" he snarled. His finger closed upon the trigger.

Suddenly there was a rifle report from outside. The Frenchman, already half out the window, jerked around. A foolish expression crossed his face for an instant, then his body tumbled out of sight.

"He was shot!" gasped Tate.

Both Quinto and the calligraphist leaped toward the window. They saw Doctor McKay appear from around the corner of the Pavilion. He was dragging

a rifle along the ground. Arriving before the window, he nodded, then knelt in the earth beside Chauvet's motionless body.

"Bandits," he said. "Stone dead! I should have let him shoot you, Quinto laddie. Lost a good chance to dissect that enormous liver of yours."

CHAPTER XV

1,940 TO 5,620

IT WAS late afternoon of the next day. Mignon Chauvet was under Doctor McKay's care. She had suffered a nervous collapse, having been confronted by a husband she thought dead, then having him reappear only to be shot down before her eyes.

The remaining internationals at the Pavilions were on edge. It wasn't entirely due to the Yellow Coat incident. The developments following it were much more disturbing. McKay had suggested pinning both the murder of Harrow and Firth on the dead Frenchman and closing the case. He was convinced Quinto was still that far from a solution.

Instead, Quinto locked himself in his office and pored over his notes on the case throughout the night. Early in the morning he had gone with Lieutenant Chi to the mountain. Added to this, was the fact that Mildred Woodford had mysteriously disappeared and her clothes were on a hook behind Quinto's door. Where was she?

Tate's albino eyes peered through the window of his small room and across the flower laden garden. The sky was overcast. It was going to rain. For a few minutes he watched the stubby figure of Sergeant Sun, standing on the roof of the guardhouse, gazing off toward Lingtung. In the path to the right, the gentle scholar, Mr. Ho, paced back and forth deeply preoccupied. He carried his arms in front, hands hidden by long Chinese sleeves.

With an irritated sigh, Tate turned from the window. His attention rested momentarily on the twin portraits of Dr. Sun Yat Sen and Pancho Villa which had been hung over his narrow army cot. Finally he sat down at his desk and returned to the study of his books: Watter's *Essays on the Chinese Language* and the *Lexicon of Kang Hsi,* China's great standard dictionary. He frowned a little for there was one problem which bothered his scholarly mind. Why should Chinese and Japanese write ciphers in French?

Opening the dictionary at random, his eyes paused upon the character, *chiao. Chiao*—the word struck a responsive chord. Soon he was plunged in thought and was so busy referring to the official Ministry of Communications code book and crossing back to the dictionary that he completely forgot the impending rains and the tension at the Pavilions.

When Quinto entered his room an hour later, the calligraphist beamed over his books like a proud archeologist about to take credit for the laying of a dinosaur egg. "You can recall the guerrilleros, Quinto," he crowed. "I've solved it. I see now why the Wang-Nohuri code was in French!"

Quinto smiled. "I knew you'd get it," he said. "Why?"

"You can't cipher Chinese!"

"I didn't think of that. Are you sure?"

"It's absolutely simple," Tate went on with authority and enthusiasm. "There's only one way to codify Chinese. For example, the telegraph company sends messages by numerals, then decodes them with reference to the Ministry of Communications code book. There are so many characters in the language, it's the only way. But number codes are easy to break down and it's dangerous because both parties have to have code books.

"With ciphers it's different. You just transpose the letters in the words. Both parties need only know the key. For Wang and Nohuri there was a catch. Chinese words aren't made up of letters. There's no alphabet. Each character is a word picture in itself so Nohuri had to look for a language with an alphabet."

"But the new *pai hua* which the government teaches has an alphabet," Quinto interrupted. "So are you sure?"

"I thought of that," Tate protested. "They can't use *pai hua.* Sometimes a single word has a dozen meanings. You recognize the exact meaning by its con-

notation in the sentence, or by the four tone system of inflection. In Canton, by the nine tone system.

"Look." Tate wrote out the word *chiao*. "If this were ciphered without tonal keys thrown in there'd be no exactness. *Chiao* can mean—unite, reptile, dog, silk thread, cushion. . . . It has eight meanings."

He paused for breath, wet his lips, glanced at the Mexican for approval and concluded rapidly: "So naturally, when messages must be brief, hidden and concise as in cipher, you must use a language with an alphabet. French, of course, is the best. The diplomatic language."

Quinto thought this over for a moment. His brow knitted together. "Very interesting," he murmured. "It furnishes one of the missing parts in our case. Very important, perhaps. But we must still search."

"For what?" asked Tate.

"The remaining missing parts, naturally. I am aware that there are some very substantial motives for the murders of Señores Firth and Harrow. However, it is mere repetition to say that no one liked Harrow. I want something to put my teeth into. His connection with Wang and Papa Wier, for instance. In the case of Firth—well, I absolve Mr. Yellow Coat. It could have been he but I doubt it. It might have been Mignon Chauvet—jealousy. Wang because he was in the room. Mr. Ho since he had no alibi. Perhaps McKay thought he had Chi for an alibi."

"But Papa Wier practically confessed."

"He's confused."

"And bitter enough to murder."

"You're too quick to condemn," murmured Quinto. "Tate, you should forget your New England American ancestry. If you condemn Wier you have all sorts of little unanswered ends flying around. Can you answer why the Generalissimo's teeth are gone? Where is Harrow's coat? Why did four men wish to meet in the cave? Why was Firth's room ransacked?"

"Money in Firth's room?"

Quinto shook his head. "He had little money in China. He drew regular army pay."

Tate hesitated a moment, glancing at the Mexican cautiously and at the same time, measuring his distance to the door. "Have you considered Virtue?" he asked.

"Ah, she's safe," said Quinto. "She's always safe."

"I don't mean that, exactly. I was thinking of Virtue and Wang. Why did Wang release Miss Woodford and not Virtue? Perhaps she is tied up with him?"

AFTER a night and a full day in the communal baths at Lingtung, Mildred Woodford finally exhausted her entire repertoire of emotions—anger, disgust, belligerency, hate, despair and embarrassment.

This last emotion was something new to Mildred. She had experienced it during the few minutes while the Mayor of Lingtung and General Ku-Chu-Tung, the Military Governor of Sianfu, looked in at the baths with the view of converting them into a gasoline dump for the new transport station soon to be established in the town.

"The foreign maiden is very clean," the slightly roguish mayor had observed with an air of pride in the fact that Lingtung had such unusual attractions to exhibit.

Both he and the military governor eyed Mildred as though she were a valuable bit of statuary. Then the governor passed comments to the effect that the British had a tendency to overdo things, particularly, bathing, imperialism, exercise and drinking.

Mildred smoldered a deep pink. Then she blew up! Driving the peasant women (who had come in droves on this second day to see the English lady bathing) from the pool under an avalanche of epithets and partially drowning the two male government officials, she splashed a good half of the water out of the pool.

Eight hours later, having eaten three unsavory meals while half immersed in hot water, Mildred's mood was one of profound desperation. It showed best in her face which glowed with an unholy cleanliness. Her interest gradually settled upon a turnscrew at the deep end of the pool. Slowly it dawned upon her that this was the water drain. An idea

formed. Weakened though she was by the long imprisonment in steaming water, she succeeded in opening the valve. In a half hour the pool was empty.

Mildred set up a veritable row. She sang and screamed and shouted until the female bath attendant rushed in and gazed upon the major catastrophe.

"I say, now, will you let me go!" Mildred demanded. "I want my clothes. I'll freeze."

The bath attendant, who was under Quinto's strictest orders to keep the Englishwoman in water, painfully seized the dilemma by both horns. After some powerful thinking she tossed it. There was only one solution—to refill the pool which would take a dozen hours by as many coolies carrying buckets of water, then replace the English lady in it. With a disapproving glance at Mildred, the bath attendant hurried out in search of coolies.

That was half the battle. Mildred wasted no time. She made a frantic search for her clothes and finding none, she wrapped herself in a large cotton bath curtain. It was dark when she sallied forth into the streets of Lingtung and it was beginning to rain.

Wrapped toga-wise in a cotton bath curtain Woodford sallied forth into the streets of Lingtung. . . . It was beginning to rain.

TATE glanced up from where Quinto was packing the tiger-jade in a cotton-lined box and looked toward the office door as it swung inward. Then his jaw sagged! He had seen many strange sights in China but nothing as incredibly fantastic as this!

Lieutenant Chi swaggered into the room, his handsome face coppery with the bloom of good health. He wore a Tyrolean mountaineer's outfit—leather, knee-length shorts, an embroidered silk shirt, leather suspenders and a sleeveless leather vest. His feet were shod with spiked mountain boots while his muscular legs sported bright woolen bands about the calves. Chi deposited an Alpinist pick and a coil of rope by the door and grinned at Tate. Doffing his Robin Hood green hat, in the band of which a chamois brush and two feathers had been thrust, he straightened his white head-bandage.

"Weather getting bad for mountain sports," he said. "I returned in the rain."

"Finish the mountain?" Quinto asked. He regarded Chi whimsically.

"With O. K. success," reported Chi.

He produced a tightly rolled, slightly damp bundle from under his arm and thrust it at Quinto. "Mr. Harrow's coat! Also his swagger stick and cross belt," he said.

Quinto took the bundle, unrolled it. The coat was weather-stained and faded from long exposure upon the mountain. The Mexican's stubby fingers carefully pressed out the wrinkles. For a minute or two he examined it for tears and blood stains. There were none.

"Where'd you find it, Chi?" he asked.

"On the same side that Harrow fell. I found it up the cliff, fifty feet above X marks the spot place. A very difficult ascent, truly."

The office door opened again, so suddenly this time that it slammed into the small of Chi's back, pitching him against Tate.

"Good Lord—" Tate gasped.

"My pardon," murmured Chi.

"Not you. Look!" Tate pointed in amazement toward the doorway.

Mildred Woodford stood there, her lanky body wrapped toga-wise in a wet sheet. Her bare feet and shivering lips were blue with cold.

She glared at the three men in the room, but especially at Quinto. "Where the devil are my clothes?" she demanded hoarsely. "And where's my notebook and my handbag? Keys to my villa are in that bag."

Quinto regarded her in his usual undisturbed manner. "I am so sorry," he murmured. "You are not angry, are you, Señorita?"

"Really, Quinto. That was beastly of you."

"But how did you get here?" asked Quinto.

"Rickshaw." Mildred snatched her clothes from the hook behind the door, wedged her purse precariously under one arm, swept up her shoes with the same hand while clutching her toga together. "Where's my notebook?" she demanded.

"It's now State evidence. I must keep it for a while," Quinto explained.

Mildred started for the door but stopped abruptly. She darted a glance dripping with venom at Quinto.

"Mind you," she said, "what I'd like to know, Mr. Quinto, is exactly what happened between the time I passed out and the time you put me in the bath yesterday!"

QUINTO chuckled reminiscently and made a polite bow as Mildred slammed the door. "W-w-where was she?" Tate asked, bewildered. "It sounds as though you and she. . . ." He stopped when he saw Lieutenant Chi.

Chi was favoring the Mexican with a look of untold admiration. It was obvious that he had his own ideas on what had happened between Quinto and Miss Woodford.

"An alarmist," Quinto said.

He gave the key in the door a twist and returned to the business of examining Abe Harrow's coat. During the next five minutes he methodically turned each pocket inside out, laying the contents in separate piles. At his request, Tate itemized the stuff.

There was a wallet containing 1200 Chinese dollars, the Sun Yat Sen variety. . . . "More than any man but a paymaster or general should carry in this army," observed Quinto.

In another pocket a small assortment of change was found. Chinese, French, English and American coins. The breast pocket revealed Harrow's usual armament of four fountain pens which Chi eyed covetously.

Having cleaned out the pockets, Quinto went on with the inspection. He ran his fingers along the lining and lapels. Suddenly, up behind the collar, he ripped out the lining. "You are right, Chi—success," he murmured.

Tate and the lieutenant leaned forward, watching silently and expectantly. They saw Quinto rip out a thin, oil-silk pouch from the collar. Unfolded, it revealed a sheaf of uniform-sized chits printed with Chinese characters.

As Quinto went through them, it became apparent that they were government issues. They were numbered, but not consecutively. The numbering ranged in wide gaps of thousands. Each chit had the chop or signature of an officer from the Central Bank of China or one of its many branches.

"Very bad!" Chi said excitedly.

"Bank receipts. Special type," said Quinto.

"Receipts!" Tate gasped.

"Bank of China chits," Quinto explained. "Because of bombings and meager policing in some provinces the Central Bank permitted people to deposit not only their savings, but their personal jewels, jades, family heirlooms and such things in the bank for safekeeping. The government moves this property to safe territory whenever it is threatened. Sixty trucks moved such

deposits when Nanking fell. These chits are receipts for goods deposits. One only need present the receipts to get one's goods back."

"But how did Harrow get them?" asked Tate.

"Don't be blind," replied Quinto. "Look. The lowest numbered chit in this group is numbered 1,940. The highest is numbered 5,620."

"Good Lord—the Nohuri cipher," Tate burst out.

"Certainly. The cipher spoke of receipts 1,940 to 5,620 to be delivered at Pan Tao. Harrow, of course, went to Pan Tao to get these from a Japanese agent."

"It fits. No wonder Harrow had so much money banked."

Quinto nodded comprehendingly. "Yes, but even the answer raises two new questions. Where did the Invader get these chits? And more puzzling, how did Harrow cash them? The chits aren't valid in the foreign or private banks; nor could he cash more than one in each branch of the Central Bank of China. A very dangerous procedure to say the least."

"What about Wang?" Tate asked.

"Ah. You've hit the important point. Papa Wier and Wang! You see, the connection between them is slowly appearing. Our task now is to tie the chits, the cipher, Wang's bookkeeping and the murders together."

Quinto selected one of the chits from the group, creased it and handed it to Tate. "The remainder go to Teng Fa," he explained. "But you will take that sample chit along to Hankow."

"Hankow?" Tate asked in surprise.

"*Si, compañero.* You and I must carry our investigation on in Hankow."

"But it'll take days to get there?"

"No. We leave tonight for Sianfu. Early tomorrow morning we'll take a military plane which Teng Fa will arrange for. *Teniente* Chi remains in charge here. He'll see that no one leaves the Pavilions."

THE Guerrilla School's big car sucked up the road toward Sianfu. It roared over the straight, twelve mile road while the speedometer needle hovered around eighty. Tate watched it anxiously. He also watched the shaved head of the young Chinese chauffeur limned against the piercing lights. On each side of the road ranks of huge camphor trees leaped out of the night.

In the darkness of the back seat, Tate felt Quinto's heavy hand suddenly drop upon his knee. "And now I will tell you something," said Quinto. "I don't think Señor Abe was murdered! Perhaps a wind killed Harrow."

Tate sat up with a jerk. "A wind?"

"Wind on the mountain. It was windy the day he died. On the mountain cliff it was probably very strong. Harrow stood close to the edge. A gust of wind could have blown him off balance."

"It's not very plausible," Tate countered. "People don't take chances like that."

"So," murmured Quinto, pursuing his logic, "if Harrow was actually murdered, we know the best motive is the receipts. But Harrow's murderer should have taken his coat, or at least, he should have taken the receipts before throwing the coat after the body. It's not logical to kill a man for receipts and then not take them."

"Wang's heel marks were on the cliff, remember?"

"Those heels, ah, yes, those heels," Quinto murmured rather disappointedly. He fell into a profoundly thoughtful mood as the car raced toward the outskirts of Sianfu.

CHAPTER XVI

WINGS OVER CHINA

THE distance between Sianfu and Hankow is four hundred and thirty miles as the crow flies. For Tate and Quinto, flying in a battered American Douglas piloted by a Manchurian aviator, the distance ran a little more than six hundred miles due to the pilot's enthusiasm for sacred mountains along the route. On four different occasions the plane described zig-zags to the left and right, circling such peaks before arriving at Hankow from the southeast instead of the northwest.

The Chinese caught his breath at sight of the jade tiger, gleaming in the gray light of the shop.

"Fine trip," observed Pilot Lan, upon landing at the military airport. "I cut off twenty miles this time."

Tate liked Hankow. He knew the city well, having worked there. And he admired the foreign consulates, the French concession, still active though surrounded by barbed wire, the public libraries, the book stalls and the shops maintained by White Russians who lived in China on Nassen passports and bitter memories.

He and Quinto drank a preliminary brandy at Mary's Bar, then he set off alone toward the Chinese section of the city. Quinto had given him an assignment to check up on Harrow and Wang the Banker.

First he visited the Ministry of War. A casual mention of Teng Fa's name

miraculously opened a series of doors and lips. He soon discovered that Abe Harrow had actually been under official suspicion of robbing the bodies of wounded and dead men at the front. Then he procured a complete list of the cash deposits and dates from the accounts of Harrow, Wang and Wier at the various foreign banks in the city. Harrow hadn't deposited chits—only cash!

Tate now walked two streets from the War Department building. He came to a bookshop displaying a sign: *Propaganda Store.* Inside there were framed silk watercolors of ducks. He paused for a moment, purchasing volumes one and two of Ch'en Ssu's, *Flowers in the Garden of Calligraphy,* and made a mental note to buy the remaining eighteen volumes when he could carry them.

His next stop was a shop that boasted prosperity by having plate glass windows instead of the usual lattice with paper-backed screens. The shop was squeezed between two barbershops and it was owned by China's wealthiest rare object dealer, Mr. Kung.

Mr. Kung, a pleasant, esthetic looking man who could be shrewd if necessary, bowed as Tate entered the gloomy, nick-nack filled place. "My shop is favored by your visit," he murmured.

"It is a poor man's delight," Tate replied formally.

Mr. Kung smiled. He was pleased that a foreigner should observe the customary openings. Most foreigners just bought things. "The shop shrinks in humble shame before your footsteps," he said.

Tate fumbled with a package he laid upon the counter. The collector helped him undo the string. When the cover was set back, the Chinese caught his breath at the sight of the jade tiger which gleamed in the gray light of the shop.

Tate immediately dropped all formality. "You've seen the jade before?" he asked.

The Chinese speared him with a penetrating, suspicious glance. "I sold it," he replied. He, too, dropped his previous formality.

"When?" Tate asked excitedly.

"Five years ago."

"Do you recall who purchased it?"

Mr. Kung nodded. "A very rich man," he murmured. "It is a fine piece —*hua shueh tai tsao.* It is the most rare work of the Ming Dynasty."

"Who bought it? The name?"

"A Cantonese official—Mr. Li Tao."

Tate's brow creased with disappointment. "In Canton," he muttered.

"The honorable Li Tao is in Hankow now," said Mr. Kung. "He is the Minister of Justice. You bought this from him? He must favor you greatly?"

"No," said Tate as he wrapped the jade tiger with one hand. "I've got to find him."

The next stop was the Ministry of Justice which was located near the War Office. The Minister of Justice was not in but two small bribes and the use of Teng Fa's name again paved the trail to a nearby teahouse. Tate dropped into a chair beside the surprised and rather oldish minister. Without wasting a moment, he unwrapped the jade tiger again.

"Is this yours?" he asked.

The minister turned pale. He looked sharply at Tate. "Who are you to have this piece?" he asked.

"I'm from the *hsien ping*—secret police," Tate replied.

The minister arched his brows. "That jade belongs to my son. Have you news?" he asked anxiously.

"News?"

"He gave you the jade tiger?"

"No." Tate explained briefly how he had gotten the tiger, but without giving too much information.

The spark of hope which, for a moment, had glowed in the old minister's eyes, quickly faded. He caressed the snowy jade with tired fingers. "I gave this tiger to my son," he murmured. "Four years ago. But my son is dead. The jade was deposited with my son's personal property at the Central Bank. I don't understand."

"Did your son have a chit for his deposit?"

The minister nodded. "He kept it with him. My son was a captain in the army. He was killed or captured by the Invader. The tiger. . . ."

"Where was he killed?" Tate asked. He expected the old man to say the Kaifeng front where Abe Harrow had been charged with robbing bodies.

"Feng Yang! My son stood against the Invader at Feng Yang," said the old man. "His body was never returned."

"Feng Yang?" Tate looked befuddled. "I'm sorry," he murmured.

For a minute, he sat back, not knowing what to think. His entire, carefully built theory had washed away. He had reasoned that if Abe Harrow were in possession of the jade tiger, he had undoubtedly filched the bank chit from the young captain's body. But Harrow had never been stationed near Feng Yang.

Then he leaped to his feet . . . The Nohuri cipher flashed through his mind. *Receipts for delivery* . . . He recognized Harrow's game. It was so simple he wanted to kick himself for not having put the entire thing together before. It was a receipt ring!

Harrow, the Ambulance Corps Captain, robbed bodies of the receipts at the front and behind Chinese lines. The Japanese took receipts from the Chinese they captured. In addition, Harrow met Japanese agents who delivered such receipts. The visit to Pan Tao. Mr. Yellow Coat was also in on it. And Wier—the old missionary had probably carried receipts from the Japanese and covered himself by saying he had been driven from his mission.

All the receipts came to Wang who, in his position as a Bank of China official, cashed them on call. He divided the proceeds between his various agents and returned a certain percentage of cash to the Japanese.

"A fine way to finance an invasion," Tate muttered. He was so excited that he rushed from the teahouse, forgetting his two books of calligraphy and leaving the jade tiger with the old Minister of Justice.

SIR OLIVER QUIST, the British Ambassador, was a jolly hulk of a man with a sense of humor. He had a bright pink face, gray hair and a graying mustache. Although in his fifties and a Britisher, he liked informality and he liked the Chinese.

The Chinese also admired the ambassador for when he had moved the embassy from Nanking to Hankow, his household had included two robin-egg blue, Soochow bathtubs. The Hankow plumbers had been faced with quite a problem—two bathtubs in one house. After a decent amount of worry and consultation among each other, the plumbers installed the tubs side by side —one for hot water, the other for cold. The news got around town and the ambassador gained much face because of his two tubs.

When Quinto arrived in Hankow, Sir Oliver knocked off work for the day. He was a great admirer of G.H.Q. ever since the two men had met a number of years before in Saigon.

Sir Oliver called in the head-man from the famous Lao restaurant and for a half hour he discussed the setting of a banquet for two. He and the restaurant man argued vehemently over the temperature, the foods in season, foods available, the wines and the number of courses which came in regulation number of either eight, twelve, sixteen or thirty-six courses. Sir Oliver glanced at Quinto and chose the thirty-six course dinner.

"Now, then, G.H.Q. We'll begin with a dash of quince wine from Canton," he chuckled heartily. "Then shark's fin soup followed by eleven meat courses. Think that's enough, old chap? Eventually we'll work up to brandy at the Last Chance Bar or Mary's."

"*Magnifico, hombre.*" Quinto looked affectionately at the ambassador. "But business first, remember?"

"Oh, bah, the business," growled Sir Oliver. "The Empire will hold! Mind you, G.H.Q., the Empire still owes you a debt for getting the Prince o' Wales out of that scrape in Saigon that time."

Quinto smiled reminiscently. "But first the matter of Clive Firth," he said.

"Ah-ha!" Sir Oliver Quist shook his head. "Lord Firth's lad. Very sad indeed, I must say. I heard from our friend Teng Fa that he died. Air raid or something, wasn't it? But I say, no

one to blame, no one at all. Gad! China lost a friend in your Firth, and England, a hero."

"He was a hero," Quinto murmured.

"Come to think of it. How's his little wife taking it? She returned to England yet?"

"Wife!" Quinto sprang up.

Sir Oliver nodded wonderingly. "Don't tell me you didn't know?" he said. "Well, perhaps you wouldn't. They were married in Nanking last summer. It's true, they separated two weeks after but I was given to understand she and her father moved in on you at Lingtung. I fancy they patched it up, you know."

"Mary Wier?" Quinto asked abruptly.

"Right ho, that's the maiden name. Yes, that's odd. He called her that name in his will."

"His will!" Quinto murmured thoughtfully. "Yes, I knew Firth had received a letter from his solicitor suggesting he return to England. I didn't know he wrote a will, though."

"It came today," replied Sir Oliver. "Seems he posted it some two weeks ago. Your mails up north are dashed slow. Well, really, young Firth begged me to pass the thing on to his solicitors."

"Let me see it," said Quinto.

"It's not quite ethical, you know." The ambassador grinned and reaching across his desk, rang a small hand bell. Almost instantly, a smooth, efficient young man entered. The embassy secretary. "Howell, look in the files, will you," said the ambassador. "Bring me the packet marked *Firth*."

Quinto let his eyes circle around the embassy office. It was a huge room with a desk in the center that looked like the landing deck of an airplane carrier. There was but one other bit of furniture in the room, a bookcase bulging with volumes in ten languages on the art of eating and cooking.

Presently Howell returned. Sir Oliver took the manilla envelope, opened the clasp and extracted two letters. One was from Clive Firth to the ambassador, asking the latter to forward his will to Simeon B. Shand of London. The other was the will.

"*Gracias*," Quinto murmured as he took the second letter and read it:

March 26, 1938

Dear Simeon:

I am deeply grieved to hear of my father, Lord Firth's death, and more so since I was unable to be with him.

Now, in regard to my returning to England to assume responsibility as the sole heir of the estate, I'm afraid it is impossible. I intend remaining in China until the war is over. I trust you can manage the estate as you have done during my father's declining years.

In the event, or against the possibility of my dying here, I want the following to stand as my Will and Testament.

I Will the Firth Estate in Scotland as well as the newspaper enterprises to my wife, Mary Wier, in China now. The deposits, other assets, bonds, etc., valued at 50,000 pounds be divided as follows: one half the total sum, upon liquidation, to be contributed in my father's name to the Chinese Red Cross; 10,000 pounds to Sir Clive Blankfort; 5,000 pounds to Lady Goodwin; the remainder to be divided equally among the family servants.

I trust you'll see that this is duly filed, Simeon.

Sincerely, Clive Firth.

"Who is Sir Clive Blankfort?" Quinto asked.

"Big game hunter," the ambassador replied. "I believe he was young Clive's godfather."

"A relative?"

Sir Oliver Quist pondered this for a moment. "No—doubt if he is," he answered. "The Firth line was on its last lap. No grandchildren. Young Clive appeared to be the last one. Oh, yes, Lady Goodwin is a cousin. Painter. She gave up studying under Picasso to marry Lord Goodwin. Then she divorced him and married again. Quite a scandal, I dare say."

"Where is Blankfort now?"

"India, I fancy."

"Who did Lady Goodwin marry?"

Sir Oliver shrugged impatiently. "Oh, someone very respectable and ordinary. Come, Quinto, let's eat!"

Quinto raised a hand, begging for time. He hurriedly re-read the will as well as Clive's letter to Sir Oliver. Finally he turned the will over, glancing at the back of the sheet. Suddenly his brow arched.

The back of the will was covered with typing but the letters were backward and the lines read from right to left.

"Have you got a mirror?" he asked the ambassador.

Sir Oliver smoldered a little but produced a small pocket mirror. Quinto placed the glass so it reflected the typing on the back of the paper.

"It's the will again, a carbon copy, only backwards," he said.

"'Pears as though young Firth intended making a duplicate but he put the carbon paper in backward. Imprint took on the reverse of the original," said Sir Oliver. "But I say, Quinto, why such a dither?"

Quinto made a slight grimace. "It's very important," he said. "Clive Firth was murdered! You didn't know that."

"Murdered?" The ambassador looked shocked.

"Yes. Seven days ago." Quinto glanced toward the door thoughtfully. "This carbon on the reverse of the will is very important, *es verdad*. I know now who murdered Señor Clive. I need only one more bit of proof."

Even before he had finished speaking, Quinto grabbed the phone from the ambassador's desk. He jiggled the hook impatiently. "Sianfu . . . connect with Sianfu . . . Guest House," he barked into the mouthpiece.

"Who are you calling?" asked Sir Oliver.

"Teng Fa!"

QUINTO, Tate and Sir Oliver Quist crossed from the administration building to the Douglas plane. Quinto carried a bundle of newspapers, *The St. Louis Baseball News*. He knew that Lieutenant Chi, the inveterate Brooklyn Dodgers fan, would be interested.

Tate had just finished his excited explanation of the receipt ring. "So you see," he said, "this ought to shut our case. It's Wang. No doubt about it."

"Yes," Quinto replied. "We both come to the same conclusions at the same time."

They arrived at the plane. Pilot Lan was already warming her up. Tate went inside and took his seat while Quinto squatted in the cabin door, conversing with the ambassador.

A saw-toothed wind ripped across the airport, tearing at the moored plane and raising swirls of yellow dust. In the southwest corner of the field ten prospective Chinese air students maneuvered through intricate squadron formations—on the ground. The new students wore long black silk gowns which fluttered in the wind. The gowns made them delicate looking for they kept their hands hidden in the sleeves. Little red buttons on their black skull caps blinked cheerfully at the world. The students zig-zagged across the field on foot, elbows extended like wings and dipping from side to side.

In the backwash of the Douglas, Sir Oliver presented a most unambassador-like spectacle. He clutched a large, half eaten turkey leg in one hand while clamping his recently dented bowler hat in place with the other. From time to time he let go his hold on the hat to reach a big fist in his coat pocket which was stuffed with loose boiled rice. He munched the rice to sort of batten down the banquet he had already eaten.

"I say, G.H.Q. no bother about that smashed window at the Last Chance. I'll cover it. Damn glad to, old chap. When are you coming back?" His hale voice boomed above the roar of the plane and whipping wind.

Quinto leaned from the cabin doorway, face flushed from the vigors of a pleasant afternoon with the ambassador. "Remember, Oliver," he answered. "I want you to be in Lingtung tomorrow night. You'll see justice done. Actually, I need you."

A sudden gust of wind twirled Sir Oliver's bowler across the field. The ambassador hurled the turkey drumstick after it but missed.

"See here, G.H.Q.," he roared. "You can count on me coming, but I want a return favor. I say, how about bringing your guerrilleros down here the following week-end and making a private raid on Nanking for me?"

Quinto's face lighted with amusement. "So?" he asked. "You left something behind when the Invader took Nanking?"

Sir Oliver Quist kissed his finger-tips while his face glowed like that of an Italian chef. "Girl!" he shouted. "I left a flower of a girl behind during the retreat."

Now Quinto's eyes softened. He had a feeling of tenderness toward big men like himself who are helplessly in love. "*Bueno*, I'll make the raid," he shouted back. "What is the *muchacha's* name?"

"Mountain of Virtue!" Sir Oliver shouted.

Suddenly the plane kicked off in a swirl of dust and taxied across the field before the ambassador caught the surprised, aggrieved astonishment on Quinto's round face.

Lan, the Manchurian pilot, was no partisan of night flying. Deep down, he realized how the *fêng shui* and other roving spirits might make a monkey of a man's compass and flying instruments. Then, where would one be, particularly with China in a blackout?

Playing safe, he followed the railroad northward to Chengchow Junction where he expected to make a left turn and pick up the Lunghai Express tracks. All in all, it added nothing more than an extra five hundred and eighty miles to the distance back to Sianfu.

But shortly before Chengchow, the plane's patched up radial engine started sputtering. Streaks of oil splattered across the cabin windows. The motor coughed asthmatically. Lan cut the throttle, wagged the wing-tips and glanced back at Tate and Quinto without alarm, saying: "*Fêng shui* in engine!"

A minute later he expertly landed the plane in the pitch dark.

"What do we do now?" Tate asked in disgust. It was just midnight by his watch.

"Sleep," replied Quinto. "We'll walk to Chengchow in the morning and catch the Lunghai Express. It leaves at noon."

"Fifteen miles!" Tate groaned.

He looked hopefully at Lan who stood before the plane engine, staring at it in respectful silence. This was the "politeness toward possibilities tactic."

Quinto shook his head tolerantly. "Spirits," he said. "Might be three or four days before they agree to abandon the motor. Lan won't touch it. Only Eighth Route Army men will touch engines like that."

CHAPTER XVII

"I AM NEVER READY TO DIE!"

AT NOON the following day, Tate boarded the rear camouflaged car of the Lunghai Express. He was filled with a queer mixture of emotions as he settled down beside Quinto who had found himself four Chinese fan tan players of passing ability. He watched the game open and then stood at the window, looking out at Chengchow during the few minutes before the train pulled out.

Chengchow was still the same. But again the town and the train left him with that vague uneasiness he had experienced once before. The town was flat and dusty. His eyes wandered across the stretch of railway yards flanked by the squat buildings of the town. Four charred railway trucks lay in a siding behind the station, the end product of a bombing raid. Soldiers and civilians swarmed over the Express like locusts.

A peasant woman hawked food outside. Tate drew a few coppers from his pocket and with one hand managed a difficult exchange, purchasing a boiled chicken which was varnished red with soya bean oil.

While munching the chicken, he surveyed the passengers boarding the train. He searched for the split-lipped Chinese man who had spied on himself and Quinto during the entire morning while they visited in Chengchow. The man seemed to have vanished.

Suddenly a mournful wail from the Belgian locomotive reached back along the tracks. The train jerked slightly. The Lunghai Express moved forward slowly, brushing people off the tracks with casual disregard for civil liberties.

The eerie sound of the whistle sent a chill up Tate's spine. He tried shaking the sensation off by concentrating on the boiled hen. It didn't help. There was something about the Lunghai Express which disturbed him—a premonition of trouble!

The impression festered as the train wound through the weird Loess Lands just beyond Chengchow, for even in the sunlight the Loess country was like a page torn from a medieval fantasy. With troubled eyes, he watched the landscape shoot by his window.

He glanced over his shoulder into the compartment and saw Quinto, as usual, winning at fan tan. It was then that he heard passengers in other compartments and those riding on the roof shouting excitedly. He looked again through the window and blinked in surprise. . . . The train was riding backward at an impossible speed!

"Spirits," Quinto said. "Might be three or four days before they abandon the motor. We walk now."

More cries from the roof: Chinese voices making bets as to when they'd jump the tracks and crash. Tate leaned out the open window. He pulled back as though he had been struck across the face. "Quinto, look!" he cried.

Quinto leaped to the window.

Up ahead, perhaps a half mile, the Belgian engine and seven cars chugged along serenely. The Express rounded a curve on the crest of a hill and disappeared. Meanwhile the eighth, the camouflaged car in which they rode, slid backward, rolling swiftly along the tracks on its own.

Excitement reached a fever pitch aboard the prodigal car. Men shouted while the less brave leaped off here and there. They could be seen rolling in the Loess dust as they landed. Amidst the uproar, a cheerful Chinese man with a split lower lip retired from the front of the car where he had cut the coupling with an acetylene torch. Still carrying the blazing torch, he passed along the corridor to the rear platform where he calmly set it down and began turning the brake wheel.

Quinto's face clouded when he saw the torch wielder pass. It was the same man who had spied on him in Chengchow. "The *Min-t'uan!*" he snapped.

The compartment door slid open and a thin, cold-faced Chinese entered. He wore western, mail order clothes. In his hand he held an automatic which he leveled at Quinto and Tate.

"*Que pasa, cojone!*" Quinto snapped his annoyance. He glanced at the gun but did not move. He was unarmed himself.

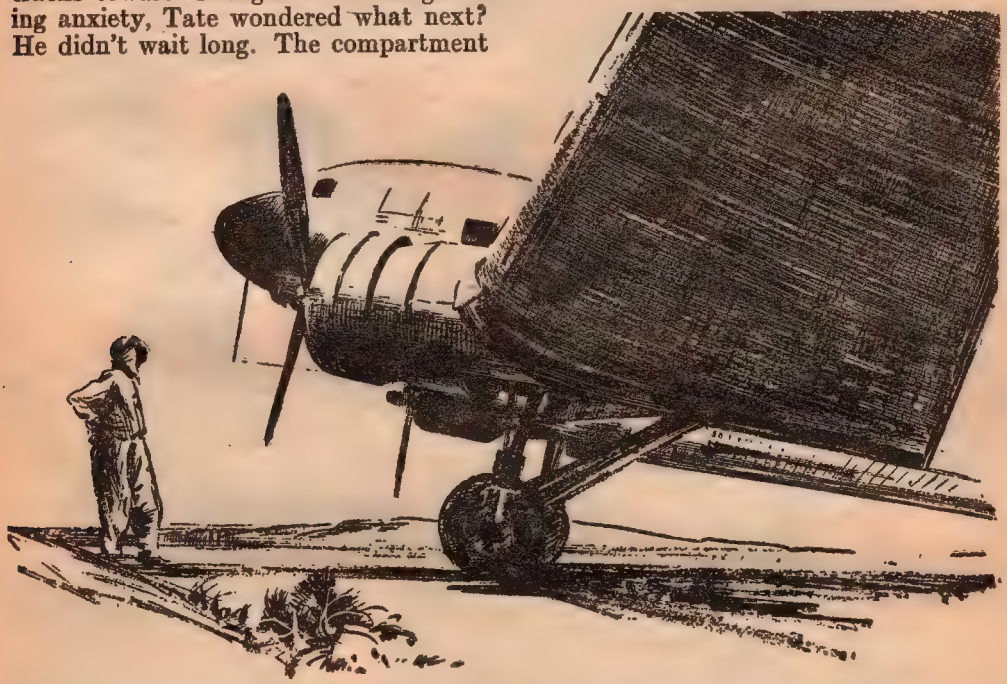
"You prisoner," said the gunman. "Everything all right. We cut car from train with torch. You stay in compartment when train stop."

He waved the four frightened fan tan playing passengers from the compartment with the gun and stationed himself at the door.

Tate had turned pale for upon look-

ing from the gunman to the window, and feeling the car come to a halt, he saw a group of armed desperados surround it. There were about twelve of them, half Japanese and half Chinese *Min-t'uan.* The fact that there were Japanese on Chinese held territory worried him. It was a bad sign.

WITHIN a few minutes the desperados had herded the passengers from the car and marched them down the tracks toward Chengchow. With growing anxiety, Tate wondered what next? He didn't wait long. The compartment



door slid back again and Wang the Banker entered, followed by Virtue. Quinto flashed the beautiful Eurasian girl a disturbed hurt look. Virtue merely smiled in her dazzling way and calmly lit herself a cigarette.

A wisp of a smirk flavored Wang's thin lips as he bowed stiffly toward Quinto. There was a touch of mockery in that bow. He quoted from a popular proverb: "Predestined enemies always meet in narrow alleyways."

Behind him, Mountain of Virtue coughed politely and murmured another proverb. "A rat who gnaws at a tiger's tail, invites destruction."

Quinto looked relieved. Not to be outdone and since Chinese etiquette demands a proverb for a proverb, he added one from the Confucian *analects.* He murmured: "A true hero never incurs present risk."

Wang bowed slightly, softened by Quinto's worthy choice. "You are very sensible," he said icily. "Co-operation and compromise are indeed hidden virtues thus far unknown in the foreigner." Suddenly his voice tightened. "You will hand me the chits!"

Quinto regarded the banker whimsically. "Chits?" he inquired blandly.

Mr. Wang's pointed military boots edged out from beneath the hem of his black silk gown. They reminded Tate of a diamond-headed snake, dangerous and lurking. Somehow, there was a certain incongruousness to the scene. It reminded him of a famous line from a Yüan drama he had once read—

> Tip us the wink said Iron Staff Li
> Then I'll cheat you and you'll cheat me.

"You are too Chinese," Wang answered Quinto. "I want the bank re-

ceipts, immediately. Before Mr. Harrow died he was in possession of certain bank chits belonging to me. After he died, his body was dispossessed of them. I've given you a week to find them. Now I insist. Where are they?"

"And if I refuse to tell you?" asked Quinto.

"You'll be shot!" Wang glanced at Tate. "You too!"

Quinto waved the danger aside as if it were completely unimportant. "And if I give the chits to you?" he asked.

Wang reflected for a moment. "You'll be shot anyway. You know too much!"

"The chits are in good hands—Teng Fa's," said Quinto.

The barb told. Mr. Wang jerked back a step. His lips compressed into thin angry slits.

Virtue raised her lovely head and shook a warning finger at Quinto. "Gi-

miendo," she said softly, "please return the chits. Wang must have them or the Japanese will be very angry with him. They threatened to chop his head off and hang it on a pole if he does not recover them."

"Hah," Tate spoke up. "The receipt ring. So that's why there are Japanese soldiers here beside the *Min-t'uan*."

"Quiet!" snapped Wang.

Tate stared at the banker and suddenly a jab of cold ran up his spine. He knew that he just wasn't made for adventure. He realized that now, in looking at Wang. But Wang didn't

Tate glanced helplessly at Quinto, then at the Japanese soldiers. "S-s-shoot me?" he stuttered.

seem to realize it. The banker crossed his hands formally and turned to the guard at the door.

"Take them out. Shoot them!" he said.

"S-s-shoot me?" Tate stuttered.

Wang favored him with a contemptuous glance.

"Come, *compañero*," Quinto cut in as he seized Tate's trembling arm and headed for the door. "It is really not so bad."

As Tate stumbled from the camouflaged car, the sun struck him in the face and it made him feel even worse.

A *Min-t'uan* man nudged him along the track bed with a bayonet, then halted him with a jerk. Tate glanced helplessly at Quinto and at the eight Japanese soldiers who had lined up opposite the camouflaged car. . . . The firing squad!

Virtue leaned against the compartment windowsill for she had remained in the car. She spoke to Wang. "You must do it with honors," she reminded him. "Gimiendo is a captain."

Wang thought this over for a minute. Though he appeared somewhat irritated by Virtue's words, he turned and issued hasty orders to have two graves dug—a large one for Quinto, a smaller one for Tate.

NEVADA and four fully armed Chinese soldiers halted to stare in the distance at the abandoned camouflaged car of the Lunghai Express, resting at the base of a scone-shaped hill.

"Express not very strong. Leave off car there. Maybe another some place else. Come back later, pick em up," suggested one of the Chinese boys.

Nevada shaded his eyes with the palm of his hand and squinted. "Looks deserted," he drawled.

"Maybe camouflage car get tired always ride in rear. Maybe she want ride up front. She go on strike," reasoned a second lad at Nevada's side.

The four soldiers waited patiently for the cowboy's answer. The tall American with the slow voice was technically their prisoner. At least, he had been until they left Chengchow Junction that morning.

How he had become a prisoner would be very amazing, if it had not happened in China. Upon leaving Lingtung, Nevada managed to reach the Lanchow front. Then, when it was discovered that he had resumed his machine-gun post while still carrying wounds not completely healed, he had been arrested. The staff-colonel at Lanchow ordered him back to Lingtung under a four-man guard. Instructions had also been sent back that Nevada should be tried and shot if he ever deserted to the front again before getting a proper medical discharge. This was his fourth offense.

At Chengchow, an even stranger thing happened. Instead of boarding the Lunghai Express, Nevada and his four guards set off on a diagonal, toward the Loess Lands and the Yellow River. Somehow they had heard that there were bothersome machine-gun emplacements on the Japanese held side of the river which needed raiding.

Nevada and his companions decided to start work on the emplacement near Tsing Hwa. The idea offered endless prospects because they could fight their way all the distance up the river and it would take weeks to reach Lingtung. By that time, Nevada figured his wounds would be healed.

Now, for the moment, the Invader machine-guns were forgotten. The cowboy's steady gaze remained fixed upon the distant railway coach. He made out the movement of human figures there. A group of men lining up, then some of them digging.

It was too distant to see plainly. The sunlight had an image-shattering quality to it. He watched another few minutes until the men who were digging stopped. Again he saw the figures line up.

"What we do?" inquired one of the guards at his elbow.

Nevada shrugged.

"Should we mosey down and see what's happening, or do we go in and raid the Japs along the river?" he asked.

"The Invaders," voted two of the guards.

"Tell you what. I'll toss a coin." He took out a copper coin while with his right hand he eased an old-fashioned Frontier Model Colt six-gun from its holster. This was one of the guns he had brought from America. "If I hit

heads, it's the river; if I clip the tails, it's the train."

He flicked the copper into the sunlight and seemed hardly to touch his right-hand gun. The explosion which followed delighted the four Chinese. Their expressions of delight changed swiftly to awe when they saw the coin flip off to one side, struck by the bullet.

All five men scrambled, searching for the coin.

WANG'S gravediggers completed their gruesome task and put aside the spades they had borrowed from the camouflaged car. Wang himself silently measured Tate and Quinto, then compared the measurements with the mounds of freshly turned earth. Finally he took out a pair of dark glasses and put them on, a precaution against Mountain of Virtue's beauty and charm which might interfere with his plans.

"We are ready!" he announced.

"Ah, no!" Quinto interrupted.

Wang looked at him coldly.

"I am never ready to die," said Quinto.

The banker glared at him and was on the point of answering when a pistol shot rang out over the Loess hills. Wang jerked to attention while his mixed band of desperados hesitated, swinging their rifles in different directions. The banker whirled on a dime, his dark eyes darting suspiciously at Mountain of Virtue who stood complacently at the compartment window, a very dream of loveliness.

"You are too hasty, Wang." She smiled disarmingly. "Slow preparations, step by step, are necessary for an assassination. You should post lookouts."

"Lookouts!" the banker snapped defiantly. He quickly detailed two *Min-t'uan* men to search the hills for the source of the gun shot.

All this while, Tate felt himself grow weaker and weaker. He wondered if he could make a deal with Wang. He didn't know how. Then Virtue's lilting whisper came to him and it seemed to carry some hope. He heard her as he sagged against the railroad car.

"One makes progress with slow delays, Gimiendo. If we persuade Wang to dig another grave . . . perhaps. . . . Last night I sent the guerrilleros who joined the *Min-t'uan* back to Lingtung for aid. Perhaps Sergeant Ping returns."

A ramrod of courage stiffened Tate's

(Continued on page 105)

The explosion from Nevada's six-gun delighted the Chinese.

IT HAPPENED TO BE

GETTING rid of Stewart's body was a hell of a job and took practically all day. Earl was a little man, middle-aged, not accustomed to tasks like this, whereas Stewart had been very big and heavy. Two hundred and twenty pounds of corpse, for reasons no physicist can give, weighs much more than two hundred and twenty pounds of anything else.

Then too, Monckton was all rocks, soft to be sure, but of every size and shape, with no allaying earth. Earl did not so much dig a grave as scrape it out. They had brought pick and shovel, intending to plant papayas and bananas on the off chance that fruit would grow in this forgotten oceanic slag heap, but these implements were of little use against multitudinous unobliging rocks and in the hands of a man unused to them.

Worst of all were the cats. They stood

A large yellow cat sprang upon Stewart's shoulders from behind.

CATS • By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT KUHN

all around looking at him. Just looking. Not getting any closer, not moving farther away, not snarling, not purring, but just sitting there looking while he buried Harry Stewart. They had come from nowhere, out of crevices he couldn't even see, and they made not a sound. The whole island seemed covered with them. No matter which way he turned, or how he shuffled and twisted, Earl always knew that some of them were behind him, regarding him gravely with huge green or yellow eyes. They were utterly without expression. Theirs was the impersonality of fate. If he approached them they showed no panic: they did not prepare to fight, or turn, or run, but simply faded away, disappearing into those crevices he could not see. When he'd leave that spot they would come back into sight.

IT JUST happened to be cats on Monckton. Animals (and this includes men) taken to Pacific islands not infrequently, indeed usually, lose all memory of manners and the obligations of bringing-up, and revert exuberantly to a simpler and less dainty life. Pigs which elsewhere would be content to nuzzle in the slime of the sty, go native in the South Seas, taking to the interior and avoiding the very sight of man. Those pigs, in fact, get to be pretty tough customers. Dogs, too. There are even wild chickens on some of the islands; and the wild cattle of the Marquesas, simple lowing phlegmatic cows at one time, homely and dependable, are best given a wide berth unless you're well gunned. Even the rabbits some fool released on faraway Phoenix, and which now swarm all over that atoll, are best left alone. And take the goats of Juan Fernandez. English pirates landed a few there with the hope they'd multiply, which they most emphatically did, cramming the island, and supplying the late Alexander Selkirk not only with food and wearing apparel but also with history's most famous umbrella.

On Monckton it was cats. Nobody knows how they got there. Nobody knows much about Monckton anyway. It is a pile of rubble somewhere near the Equator and not near anything else at all, and it is shaped like a fishhook, its 400-odd acres virtually being placed end to end. It was discovered by a Captain Jacob Monckton of New Bedford, Mass., in 1830-something, who found to his annoyance that though there was a spring there it was such a small one that he'd need weeks to fill his casks. There were, however, a lot of birds there then, mostly boobies and frigate gulls, and in consequence a lot of guano. In the '50's occasional whalers would put in at Monckton and work the guano beds for all they were worth, until at last they were worked out. At about the same time the birds deserted Monckton, nobody knew or cared why. This meant no more guano.

It must have been the cats that chased the birds away. One cat might hesitate to take on a frigate gull, but a dozen wouldn't. Some ship's captain must have taken his tabby ashore on a guano digging expedition once, which tabby was in a family way, as the saying is; or else he took *two* cats ashore. Anyway, it or they promptly left him, answering the call of the wild, and Monckton for the first time became inhabited. Talk about guinea pigs! Those pussies were a fine healthy upstanding bunch.

They were never reported because who was there to report them? Once the guano was gone nobody had the slightest interest in Monckton Island.

An American discovered the place and Americans had worked, indeed overworked, the guano beds; nevertheless, operating on a traditional principle that everything in this world that isn't labeled and tied down belongs to her, Great Britain had assumed sovereignty, and on British Admiralty charts, and sometimes on those of other nations, after the pinpoint and then the name "Monckton" would be printed "(Br.)" But this was sheer force of habit. Actually the British did not do a thing about it, even when the Pan-Pacific Airways crowd, without asking anybody's permission, calmly appropriated the island.

For Monckton was one of those marine flyspecks, like Midway, Wake, Howland, Palmyra, Jarvis, Enderbury, Christmas, which popped into world importance when planes began to cross the Pacific.

Not that Monckton was in line for anything. If anybody else but the Pan-Pacific Airways outfit had been doing the job, Monckton would have been ignored. It offered no possible landing field, and a seaplane could have been brought down in its skimpy lagoon only after a great deal of time and money was spent to dynamite the blue and purple coral heads with which that lagoon was splotched.

THE only reason why Pan-Pacific Airways sent anybody there was in order to check winds in that part of the world, so that if at any time in the future they should be obliged temporarily to reroute their planes they'd have this information already in hand. The chances against the report ever being used were about a thousand to one. Still, it wouldn't do any harm. And they weren't going to spend much money on it—a radio operator who wasn't able to hold a job anywhere else because of his drinking and who was eager to go to Monckton at a very small salary since this would forcibly keep him away from the stuff; two Hawaiian servants; and a U. S. Weather Bureau man who had always dreamed of the South Seas and was ready to work for next to nothing. A few hundred dollars worth of supplies; a few hundred dollars worth of radio equipment; and the barometers, anemometers, dry and wet bulb thermometers, and so forth, which the eager little Jarman Earl was himself supplying.

The P.-P. A. supply ship dropped them off the 7th of January, and they were to stay exactly one year. A construction crew went ashore with them and built them a shack for sleeping, another for the radio equipment, erected too a couple of very tall poles for the aerial, what time the sailors were landing supplies. Then everybody but Jarman Earl and Harry Stewart departed. The Hawaiian couple who were supposed to stay there and cook and wash for them and do general work, balked when they saw Monckton. They thought of their own native Maui when they thought of an island, or of Oahu, or Hawaii itself, red and dark green, a land seamed with streams, rich with hills. They took one look at this flat scorched ash-heap and shook their heads. Contract or no contract, they refused to go ashore.

"We'll bring you another couple next time we're out this way," the skipper had promised. "You'll be all right. Matter of fact, you'll be glad to have a little extra work. Something to do."

Jarman Earl, holding Susan in his arms, looked around at the brownish-yellow coral at the dry clumps of tree heliotrope, the stunted *kou* thickets, the *noni* trees—and in spite of himself he sighed.

"Yes, I suppose you're right. . . ."

They put up the plinth and the flag, they took pictures, they shook hands, and then the supply ship sailed away. It was to return in about six weeks, everything being favorable. But since Earl and Stewart had supplies enough to last at least six months, and since an immediate report was not going to mean anything to the main office anyway, no promise was made. The ship *would* be back, sometime. Meanwhile it was only necessary for Earl to measure wind and rain while Stewart kept open communication.

The two men had not liked one another from the beginning, on the ship, for they were indeed practically opposites—Stewart big, hard-boiled, surly, while Jarman Earl was a little, peery, eager man, mild of manner and utterly

without experience in tropical places. Stewart was openly contemptuous of Earl and when he saw Susan he snorted.

"What do you want to bring a *cat* with you for?"

"Company," Earl explained. "I'm very fond of Susan. I've had her for years, ever since she was a kitten."

"Figure she's going to catch mice out on Monckton? Or maybe go looking for catnip?"

"A year is a long while," Earl pointed out, and Stewart, thinking of liquor, nodded seriously. "I've brought along plenty of books, of course, but I wouldn't want to be anywhere very long without Susan." He blinked innocently. "Don't you like cats?" he asked.

"I hate 'em! Nasty, sneaky goddamned things! There's *dogs* that're all right. That's a different thing, dogs. But cats? No! All they want you for is what they can get out of you."

Earl shrugged. When anybody talked like that, there was nothing more to be said. Earl could understand indifference to cats, though himself he had never felt this; but how anybody could go so far as to dislike them was too much for him.

THE very afternoon of the day the ship sailed they had a quarrel. Stewart, moving a drum of gasoline destined for his charging engine, stumbled over Susan and with a curse kicked the Persian. Well, he didn't so much kick it as shove it swiftly with his foot; but this came to the same thing. Earl flared.

Now Jarman Earl was as quiet a man as you're likely to meet. He had worn glasses since boyhood, he had never been in a fight, he never wanted to be. He had his share of courage—no man without it would have dared to settle on Monckton for a whole year—but the give and take of blows, even the raising of voices, he deemed foolish. All the same, he flared when Stewart kicked his cat. Glasses quivering on his nose, his eyes snapping, he faced up to Stewart, who must have been 5 inches taller and 100 pounds heavier.

"Listen. There'll be none of that!"

"There won't, eh?"

"There won't. If it happens again, you'll have to kick me too."

"That wouldn't be so hard," grunted Stewart, and returned to his drum.

But at dinner time Stewart came to him very decently and held out a hand and said, "I'm sorry about that business."

"Forget it," muttered Earl, and they both fell all over themselves trying to get the meal.

"I'm nervous," Stewart explained later. "I know I don't look it, but I am. I've got a bad case of jitters. If you're not a drinking man you won't understand."

"I'm not."

"That's why I say I'm sorry in advance for anything I do. I'm an all right guy when I have a little nip now and then, but out here I don't know what I'll be like."

"I'm sure we'll get along fine."

"I hope so."

It wasn't until the next day, the fifth day they were on Monckton, the second since the supply ship had gone, that they learned about the cats. It wasn't until then that Earl learned what a coal-to-Newcastle was Susan. Until that time they had been busy setting up camp. When they took their first walk they got a shock.

Stewart was surly again, and snappish, and Earl had got over the impression of fairness and essential amiability caused by his apology of the previous night. The man was a grouch, he was a cheap tough; undoubtedly he would be an unpleasant and perhaps even a dangerous companion. But they were going to be here for a whole year, and Jarman Earl was determined not to let *his* nerves misbehave.

"Funny there aren't any birds," Stewart said. "Nothing here at all. The animals got more sense than we have. They stay away."

It was sufficiently dreary. You could have counted the tree heliotropes, *kou* thickets and *nonis* on your fingers and toes, and even these were stunted, wizened, juiceless, seeming to crouch low in fear of the might of the sun. The only other vegetation was a dry brittle brownish-green grass, skimpy enough where it existed at all, and uninspiring. There was no real earth, only soft chunks of coral at no point more than 15 feet

above the level of the sea. A good wave might have washed clear across the island. This was like living on a raft.

"That's one reason why I brought Susan. I figured—"

"*What's that?*"

A PAIR of yellow eyes, very bright, very large, shone from out between two rocks. Presently with no sound the cat itself emerged. And then another, and another. They were neither especially large nor notably small, and while most of them were yellow there were tortoise-shells too, and maltese, and mixtures of various sorts.

"Hell, nobody told us about these."

It was true. The preliminary scouting party the P.-P. A. had sent out, to verify the island's very existence and to be sure there was water on it, had spent no more time on Monckton than it needed. No member of that party had even glimpsed the cats.

They squirmed out of spaces between loose-piled chunks of coral, moving with the agility of snakes and with no more noise. Supple, satin-muscled, they emerged unblinking.

Understand: These were wild cats, but not wildcats! There was no hint of the lynx about their ears. No suspicion lit their large solemn eyes. It was the parlor and not the woods that they brought to mind; and any one of them, prim, immaculate, dignified, would have done marvelously well in front of a fireplace at teatime, purring. Here on this remote bleached uninhabited outcropping of coral they contrived somehow to look perfectly at home and self-satisfied. There were no birds to eat, there was no edible vegetation, so it must be that they'd lived these years on a diet of fish and sand crabs; but assuredly they looked sleek.

"Christ! the place is full of them!"

Yes, they appeared from everywhere, from the earth. Scores. Hundreds.

"I hate cats," Stewart said unnecessarily. "They give me the creeps. *Git* out of here!"

He threw a stone. One cat, grazed, let out a quick chopped-off yowl. It alone moved a little. The others were motionless.

"There's no use hurting them," Earl said mildly.

He had always loved and trusted cats, and when he found himself frightened, now, he could only suppose that the fault was his own. He was thinking of Susan, that dear little powder-blue Persian. Susan was the best company a man could have. Men swore by dogs, sneering at cats, but Jarman Earl believed that a cat was as good a companion as any animal in this world. And he would have staked all he owned on Susan.

"Hurt 'em, hell! I'll teach 'em where they get off at! If we're going to live here a year we got to get this thing straightened out right now!"

Timid himself, Earl thought of other men as crammed with courage. Particularly burly men, like Stewart. He did not realize that Stewart was in fact panicky. Stewart was, just then, stark mad. He snatched a stick and ran, swinging it, shouting, cursing, straight at the cats.

It startled them—for even cats can be startled, though they seldom let it show. What followed happened very fast and before Earl could do anything about it whatever.

A large yellow cat sprang upon Stewart's shoulders from behind, from the top of a high Stonehengey chunk of coral. Others were snarling and spitting and clawing at his legs.

He screamed when he felt the cat on his shoulders, but though he whirled around, trying to beat it off with his left hand, he kept flaying the air with the stick in his right.

Then suddenly there were no cats. They had vanished. They could have overwhelmed Harry Stewart by sheer weight of numbers, but they preferred many small victories to a single grand and bloody one.

And Stewart stood triumphant, but at the same time ridiculous, the stick in his hand. He was panting, sweating, bleeding too.

"*You* were a lot of help."

"I didn't have a chance— I was just going to—"

Stewart paid him no attention, and Earl saw at last that the man was shaken. He was trying so hard not to show it that he showed it very clearly.

"We'd better get back to the house," Earl said. "You've got some pretty nasty scratches there on your neck."

Each had taken a short course in first-aid before coming out, and they had a tolerably good medicine chest, though it was absurd to think of germs in such a wind-swept atoll, where nobody had supposed there were any animals excepting the crabs.

Earl swabbed the cuts with disinfectant, most of them being where Stewart couldn't see them. They were amazingly numerous, considering the brief time that the cat had been on Stewart's shoulders. Or perhaps *two* cats had been there. It had all happened so fast. . . .

Neither of them spoke much while Earl treated the scratches. Once Susan came rubbing against Stewart's ankle, her back arched, her tail straight up, purring, asking for love.

"*Get that goddamned—*"

"All right, all right," Earl said quickly and without anger.

He lifted Susan away. He took her to the door.

Outside, the cats had reappeared. Scores, hundreds of them, yellow and gray, with yellow and green eyes, they sat regarding the shack. They did not move or yowl. They simply sat there.

Earl closed the door. He put Susan down, stroked her a moment.

"She'll be all right here," he promised, and returned to the scratches.

"She better be," muttered Harry Stewart.

WHAT to do about Susan became Earl's problem, for he was afraid that she would join the other cats, go wild; or else, more vaguely, that she would be somehow abducted. This worry seemed amusing to Harry Stewart; it did not to Jarman Earl.

Stewart objected to the cat being inside. He was forever stumbling over it, he complained; and Susan, with the perversity of her kind, made a point of rubbing against him on every possible occasion. On the other hand, Earl was afraid to leave her outside, especially at night. He even wanted to put up the hurricane shutters—there were no glass windows—in order to keep Susan from getting out. To this plan Stewart objected.

"Want to live in a Turkish bath?"

Earl's response was weak, for he saw the justice of Stewart's stand.

"We could sleep outside. We could easily take the cots out there. It ought to be nice. Under the stars."

"And what happens if it rains, sweetheart? Nix! You can do that, if you want, but I'm going to stay indoors with all windows open. No cat's going to tell *me* where to sleep!"

THREE days later Stewart died. He was prowling on the other end of the island, at the tip of the fishhook, a good two miles from the beach where the shacks were, while Earl was dusting his books—Chapman and Milne, Preston, Napier Shaw, Dobson, Durward, Lampfert—and wishing he had brought some novels instead. After all, he knew as much as he was ever going to know about meteorology. Susan sat in a window, staring with rapt interest at the island cats, and she did not come to him when he called. He went to her and stroked her. He looked in the direction in which she was looking.

There were sixty or seventy cats, and as always they simply sat staring at the house. Now and then one, for no apparent reason, would walk seriously to a place a few yards away, and sit down again, and continue to gaze. They never made a sound.

He was afraid of them. He had to admit it. And he was worried about Susan.

There was a disturbance behind them somewhere, several hundred feet back. There was a scuffling noise, and cats moved away from the place. Puzzled, Earl went outside, Susan following him.

The cats made way for him when he walked toward them. He had to turn his back to some, and he never liked to do that.

He found a maltese, a fair-sized tom, stiff, with stiff legs, yet jerking convulsively and making a thin *scree-ing* noise in its throat. He felt sorry for it, but he didn't know what to do. No other cats were nearby. The maltese twitched a while, then relaxed. It tried to rise,

dizzy, unseeing. It toppled, and then another fit seized it. A few minutes later it was dead.

Earl snatched up Susan and ran back to the house. He put Susan inside, then hurried out to the tip of the fishhook. He was running the last half mile. He found Stewart hunting seashells, and Stewart was not at all pleased to see him. It had been their unspoken agreement that when one took a walk he should be left alone.

"Listen!" Earl shouted. "A cat's just had convulsions! It died!"

"That's fine. I wish they all would."

"You don't understand! What could the convulsions be? It could—the only thing—maybe tetanus!"

Fear swam into Stewart's piglike eyes; his face went white.

"My God, you're right," he whispered. "Those scratches. . . . The disinfectant wouldn't be enough for that."

"I think you ought to send a message to the main office. That's something nobody ever figured on, tetanus. Nobody knew the cats were here. But it *could* be. I think we ought to get some serum."

They started back, walking very fast.

Everywhere cats watched them. The cats never got in their way, but moved to one side as they came, and watched them pass.

About halfway back Stewart let out a cry more horrible than anything Earl had ever heard, a hoarse, gurgling yell of pain. Hurrying, he had been walking with his body bent slightly forward; but now he went right over on his back, emphatically, violently, as though somebody had pushed him in the chest. His back arched unbelievably—it seemed as though his spine must snap. His arms were flung straight out at his sides, stiff, the thumbs drawn in against the palms. Supported only by his feet and his head, he twitched. He seemed to be straining himself in an effort to arch his back even more. His eyes were wide open; he was grinding his teeth; his face, which had been white, was flooded now with blue.

There was nothing for Earl to do except loosen the clothing and with a handkerchief try to keep the man from biting off his own tongue. The convulsion lasted for perhaps three minutes. Then Stewart collapsed. He closed his eyes. Earl shook him.

"Listen. You've got to get back to the shack! You've got to send that S.O.S.!"

Stewart opened his eyes and gazed groggily at Earl. "All right," he said.

Earl was helping him to his feet when he had another convulsion. The big body sprang out of Earl's arms like a steel spring released. The back was arched achingly, the legs and arms stiffened. The blue of the face was so dark as to be almost purple.

Stewart had six convulsions in all, and they followed one another in quick succession. Except between the first and second, he never recovered consciousness. He died a few minutes after the sixth was ended.

The cats watched this. When Jarman Earl looked up he saw them there, all around him, all seated, solemnly staring.

He ran back to the house, feeling all the while that perhaps he should not leave the body like that. But he had to leave the body for a time. The pick and shovel were at the shack. He had to bury Stewart. He had to do this right away. In the tropics there must be no delay in such matter. And besides, there were the cats.

Susan was not inside. He noticed this immediately, and it troubled him, but he thought that it wouldn't be decent to look for her while that body lay unattended. He called her a few times, and when she did not respond he returned to the mortal remains of Harry Stewart.

At last he got it done. They watched him all the while, as he sweated and strained, panting, sometimes sobbing a little. They sat there and watched.

And when at last, late in the afternoon, he went back to the house, they followed him, stopping when he stopped, going ahead when he did. And they sat in a circle around the house.

BY THE book, cats are individualists, and will never, like dogs gone wild, like wolves, like horses, chickens, cattle, move and act in groups.

As far as Earl could see, the cats of Monckton had no leader or even set of leaders or type of leader. Yet he never heard or saw a fight among them.

They never made a menacing movement toward Earl, yet he was afraid of them. They had killed Harry Stewart, that hulk of a man. They would kill him too, soon. Perhaps the poison was already in his system. Stewart had had no warning. They had struck him with the sudden savage fury of lightning. And how the man must have suffered! Perhaps he himself, Jarman Earl, would suffer like that, at any moment, with no warning.

He was afraid of the cats. The only time he went out-of-doors was when he searched for Susan, an hour or two each day. He would venture farther and farther from the house, searching for her among the multitude of cats, calling her name, "*Su*-san! Come, Susan!" his plaintive piping voice carrying across the lagoon, across the reef, out into the vast emptiness of the Pacific. Had they killed her? Why should anybody or anything want to kill a cat as gentle and sweet as Susan? But why didn't she answer him? Was she lurking somewhere under the rocks, in that abode of darkness and mystery known only to the cats themselves and into which from time to time they vanished? "*Su*-san!" A breeze caught up his voice, and smeared it, thinning it out of existence, and then passed on, forgetting it. "Come, Susan!" But he did not find her.

He would tinker furiously with the radio apparatus, about which he knew nothing at all. Expecting at any moment to get a shock, he'd push this, pull that, turn another thing on or off, hoping that somehow he would create some kind of disturbance among the airwaves which would cause somebody to wonder what the hell was happening, and to investigate; hoping, that is, that in spite of his ignorance he would get up some sort of S. O. S. If the transmitting set had been a telephone set, then perhaps he would have been able to communicate with the outside world. But it wasn't. And Earl did not even know how to attach the bug, much less send any sort of message. He searched Stewart's personal effects, hoping to find a copy of the Morse code, but he found none; undoubtedly Stewart had carried that in his head.

He would scan the horizon for hours each day, and the sky above too, for his hope, his only hope, was that the Pan-Pacific people, when they failed to hear from this station, after three or four days would send out a supply ship or a plane to investigate. They might figure at first that Stewart had been having trouble with his apparatus; but after all the man was an expert and had brought a complete set of tools and spare parts; and the apparatus and batteries, the charger, too, were brand new. Any trouble he might have would certainly be repairable. Wouldn't they, then, Earl thought, after three or four or five days of silence from Monckton, figure that Stewart was either dead or seriously ill?

THE idea had been, when they came here, for Stewart to teach Earl something about radio, so that Earl in a pinch could at least communicate with the main office. But of course there had been no time for this. With a whole year ahead of them, neither man had been eager to start the lessons.

A whole year. . . . But he kept telling himself that he would soon be off this island, away from those cats. A plane would certainly come. Or even if a plane didn't come, the supply ship would be back in five weeks or so. Perhaps. In another three months, anyway.

Three months! God, he could never live through it! But a plane would come.

He went to the door, opened it, and stood drenched in sudden overwhelming sunshine. He blinked, not being able to see anything for a little while. For the house was dim now, with all the hurricane shutters in place—dim and close and withering hot. "*Su*-san!"

The powder-blue Persian was not there, but other cats were. Tireless, they kept their vigil. They had killed Harry Stewart, they would kill Jarman Earl. He wondered, scowling at them, whether they had killed Susan. His one friend in all the world. To be sure, he had not seen anything that might be taken for Susan's body; but it occurred to him now, not pleasantly, that he had never seen the body or skeleton of any cat here. They must die, from time to time. What happened to them?

He was glad that he had buried Stewart with prompitude. There would be

nobody left, he thought wildly, to bury *him!* He searched the sky, which was empty, and the sea, empty too.

He stepped inside, shutting the door. The house was dim, though not dark, for determined sunshine forced its ways in as javelins and planes of glare, and it was stifling in its heat. Earl lay on his back, sweat pouring off him, and panted like a dog. He felt a trifle sick, from weakness, from fear, and from the heat. He'd had very little sleep in the past week, none at all in the past two days, and when he did fall asleep, now, it was almost an event.

There was a tremendous buzzing, heavy and hollow, that came and went many times before he was fully awake. It was fading just at that time, and he sat up realizing that it was not part of any dream but an actual sound.

He rushed outside, leaving the door open. Half blinded by the sunshine, he was waving his arms long before he could distinguish the plane. It was a speck now, and presently it disappeared, its drone having long since died. He waved and waved, he shouted, he even ran stumbling along the beach, paying no heed to the cats; but it was clear that he had not been seen.

"No, no! Don't go away! *Come back!*"

The pilot had flown over Monckton several times and had seen nothing wrong. The camp was in order, the aerial in place. Nobody was in sight. Stewart and that little fellow Earl presumably were taking a siesta, natural enough thing to do. No distress signal. . . .

Oh, *why* hadn't he thought to rig some kind of distress signal!

So the pilot had flown away.

"Come back! Come back!" Earl was crying when at last he fell down. "Don't leave me! Come back!"

The plane had been out of sight then for five minutes or more.

THEY did not tell him about Harry Stewart's grave when they came in the P.-P.A. supply ship. They did not tell him what the cats had done to that grave and to Stewart's body. There would not have been any use telling him this, for he wouldn't have understood.

When they came he was in the house, talking to somebody, shouting in fact, not to himself, not to them, but to somebody only Jarman Earl himself could see.

"Make it go away! It wants to kill me!"

Frantically, wildly, knocking over furniture, bruising and cutting himself, he was backing away from a small powder-blue Persian cat which, purring, back up, tail in the air, kept trying to sidle up to his ankles, to rub against him, asking for love.

"SILENT WAITS MY TOMB"

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Peary plowed a path for the weary, floundering dogs, and slowly the miles fell behind.

WITH NO ACCLAIM

A FACT STORY

By VICTOR SHAW

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT KUHN

INTO the teeth of a Greenland blizzard, screaming down from the top of the world, two fur-muffled human atoms sledged north in the polar winter night through Kane Basin, bound for Fort Conger on Lady Franklin Bay. It was the black winter of 1898, remarkable for its violent storms, so savage and unceasing that even these veterans of the snow trails, Peary and Hensen, had never seen its like.

The great wind roared upon them from the vast funnel of Robeson Channel with insane fury, slowing their march to a crawl. They were blinded, deafened, smothered by barrages of ice needles and snow shot that cut through thick furs like so much cotton, forcing the dogs to turn tail and cower whimpering in harness as unyielding as bands of steel. A whip was as useless as an iron bar. Shouted commands blasted into space unheard.

Lesser men might have sought a sheltered lee and camped, but not these twain. They marched against time. To save weight, food supplies were reduced to a minimum. On this trek every ounce counted. When the channel ice buckled, groaning in thunderous travail under the incalculable impacts of wind and tide, they simply swerved aside to the shoreward maze of tilted, cross-ridged pressure ice and slogged north upon their mission, stoically unmoved.

For this was a reconnaissance of vital

importance to Peary's planned assault upon the Pole next year. It was scheduled purposely for the winter slack season, when this route from his Etah base to Conger afforded solid footing, rather than the menace of deadly battering floe bergs charging wild in open summer waters.

Never having been to Conger, it was imperative that he examine route and location for future use as an advanced base; also that he inspect the present condition of dehydrated and sealed supplies of food left by the ill fated Greely party on the memorable retreat to Cape Sabine sixteen years before. From previous talks with General Greely, coupled with his own experience in such matters, Peary believed that much of this food still was usable. In fact, his conviction was so strong that he now carried food only for the journey north, being sure of ample supplies at Conger for the return trip.

Further, he had picked this calendar period of the full moon counting upon its aid, yet not once had visibility reached beyond his lead dog, and the ceiling remained at zero with no break in the driving black cloud pall. Now, the resulting delay was cutting down his stock of food at such an alarming rate that he knew it would not last to his objective. He therefore cut rations to the bone, shortened rests, lengthened marches, and to conserve strength reduced their alternate periods of trail breaking.

Thus, with tight drawn fur hoods bowed to the whiplash of the storm, they battled slowly north, mile by hard won mile—choked breathless by lung searing gusts, stumbling blindly over drifted ice mounds, pausing only at intervals when the sledge overturned, to right it, untangle snarled harness, kick the dogs into line and keep always moving on.

Peary's sole reference to this portion of the trek was the laconic statement: "at Point Hayes our tea gave out . . . at Grinnel Head we ate the last of the chocolate . . . at Cape Bryan we finished the soup tablets . . . at Cape Baird only dog food remained."

Close figuring? Indeed, the margin of safety was so slim it was well nigh invisible.

Note that the storm-shrouded headland of Cape Baird was the southern outpost of Lady Franklin Bay, from which Conger across on the opposite shore is in plain sight—in *clear* weather. Just a romp for the dogs—had they not been underfed, trail weary and exhausted, limping on frosted pads worn through to the quick.

Too, there was the coming problem of finding the wooden framed building of Fort Conger in a storm-veiled strange location. Worse yet, although this they could not know, a pitfall devilishly masked lay between them and their goal, into which one false step could wreck completely all their plans. And, all unwitting, Peary took that step. For it was here that both his feet were frozen.

TO THE uninitiate it may seem strange, that these veterans of the snow trails should not have been able to foresee, and so avoid and safely pass, this all too common Greenland hazard. But conditions here were abnormal; to the extent that, visibility being practically nil, experience and foresight were of little avail. Lay it to destiny . . . or luck.

Tides are extremely high in these frigid latitudes, where in winter's low temperatures even sea water freezes. So, when every sea and bay and cove is locked, the irresistible thrust of a rising tide fractures the thickest shore ice to permit an overflow upon its surface under the mantling snow. This snow cover delays freezing, while hiding the layer of wet slush on the ice.

Thus, the trap. And although the Innuit footgear is well made, all seams sewed tightly with caribou sinew, no kamick is wholly proofed against this penetrating type of moisture. In this instance, hard steady travel had doubtless loosened seams in Peary's kamicks enough to admit the deadly dampness.

The trap was sprung while they were crossing the bay. Hensen happened to be guiding the cranky wallowing sledge, while his chief was taking his turn at breaking trail. Well in the lead, thigh deep in wind-packed snow, Peary plowed a pathway for the weary floundering dogs, on a compass course he had memorized.

Out on the bay they caught the full

force of the gale, as its banshee blast drove through the three hundred mile wind tunnel formed by Robeson Channel to the north and Archer Fiord, that reached an eighty mile finger southwestward into Grant Land. Braced against its terrific drive, lost in the midnight maelstrom, Peary fought ahead grimly step by step. Somewhere behind, Hensen gripped the rear upstanders of the sledge with powerful mittened paws, every muscle strained like a bow string to keep it from blowing over.

Slowly the miles fell behind. The midway point was reached and passed. Suddenly Peary felt an ominous dampness on the soles of both feet. He stopped short, whirled, crowded the dogs back in a bewildered struggling heap, hurled a warning shout at Hensen. It took but little time for both men to straighten them out; after which Peary swung the team in a mile-wide arc to circle the danger zone on safe dry footing and get back on his course as nearly as possible.

Instant action spared Hensen and the dogs a like mishap. Had they gone a team length farther. . . .

Bad enough, Peary knew only too well. Without pause, nor a word to his companion, he forged ahead at top speed. He must gain shelter and take proper measures, useless to attempt on the open bay. He must exercise those feet, keep constantly moving, find the Greely headquarters with no loss of time.

Talk about tough jobs! In that devil's dance of windlashed snow clouds, it looked like a hopeless task. After sixteen years of battering winter storms he couldn't be sure the building had not collapsed. Even the position of the shoreline was uncertain. Nor, worst of all, did he know just where he would hit it and the locating of Fort Conger depended wholly upon this vital point.

The compass bearing from Cape Baird was charted to intersect the shoreline directly in front of the building, which stood a good stone's throw beyond on an elevated flat bench. But the recent mishap had thrown him off that course. Now he could not be sure if he was on it, or at some distance to one side of it. On top of this, when he arrived at what he judged to be the spot, he found a chaos of high mounded drifts that effectually concealed the vital contact point between bay and shore.

There being no way to remedy this, he posted Hensen there with the sledge, noted that the wind here slanted inland and pushed on, cautioning Hensen to keep shouting at intervals. In fact, as he at once lost sight of the sledge, this was the only method that he could devise that would serve as a guide to his return.

THE time must have seemed endless, as Peary wallowed back and forth and around in the swirling frost mist, often hip deep in high mounded drifts. Weakened by short rations, trail worn, feet already numbed like twin blocks of wood, only a steel will could have kept him on the move.

Nowhere could he find anything like a building and at long last, baffled, desperate, nearly at the end of his strength, he was stumbling back after Hensen's help, when one knee unexpectedly collided with some unyielding object. Swiftly stooping he felt it over with groping mittened hand, identified it—the tiny triangular peak of the gable end of Conger's roof. All the rest of the building was completely buried.

A bellowing hail brought Hensen and the dogs on the gallop. With frantic haste a snow tunnel was pawed down to a window, and in through this men and dogs scrambled as into a quiet haven from the storm and frost. Darkness was banished by a lighted wind match. They stared amazed about the big room, which the Greely party in 1881-1883, had used as living, working and sleeping quarters. The dry cold air held no hint of mustiness and, oddly, it looked as if the previous tenants had just pulled out the summer before.

Tumbled bedding lay heaped just as they had crawled from it so many years past. Lamps, books, writing materials, lay strewed or piled on bedside stands. On the long mess table, soiled tinware with scraps of food, tin cups, knives, forks, spoons, testified to hasty evacuation. Agateware hung on nails beside the big steel range. And best of all, as Peary had foreseen, great stores of food were stacked high around the walls, in boxes, crates and barrels.

Referring later to these supplies, which had proved to be in excellent condition, Peary reported: "There was coal, drums of gasoline and oil, Primus stoves, tinned meats, pemmican, dried fruits and vegetables, soup tablets, barreled hardtack, food of all sorts—enough to have fed the Greely party at least three years." For these two adventurers it now meant life and hope.

Swiftly a barrel of hardtack was broached, jam opened, pemmican found for the famished dogs; food was ravenously devoured, as Hensen built roaring fires in range and heating stove. Slowly the big room warmed, water boiled, soup and chocolate steamed, for the first real meal in a hundred heartbreaking miles.

Then only did Peary tell of his mishap, examine the extent of the injury, for this short delay now mattered little. The damage was already done.

Hensen got busy at once, forgetting all else. It was a long arduous job requiring utmost care in handling. But behind Hensen lay years of practice, while his chief knew every method of frost extraction.

All this was needed, too, and more.

For, although both lower legs were somewhat affected, the condition of the feet was a matter for grave concern. The soles and toes were livid, brittle, shrunken, with the dreaded mottled skin, apparently already dead. Hours of slow careful treatment followed, after a first thorough spraying with ice water, with Hensen, as major domo, dividing his time between this vital task, the stoking of the stoves, feeding the dogs, and rubbing healing salve on the raw pads.

Hours passed during which his chief clamped grim jaws upon the agony of returning circulation. The treatments were broken by periods of rest, but Peary was too pain racked to obtain a tithe of the sleep he sorely needed. And thus, after having done everything they knew how to do, it became obvious that it was not enough.

In this strait, even a vivid imagination will fail fully to compass the dark abyss into which Peary's spirit must have fallen. Too well he knew what was inevitable now, the disintegration, sloughing, the final mortification—that in surgery alone lay hope of preserving anything below the ankles . . . perhaps even below the knees.

But that flaming spirit never had admitted defeat. Nor did it fail him now, faced by the utter frustration of his transcendent ambition—by knowledge that, if crippled, he must abandon all hope of reaching Ninety North.

One slim chance remained. Return to Etah at top speed.

At Etah, three hundred terrible miles south, where his ship, *Windward*, lay frozen in for the winter, the expert skill of his surgeon, Doctor Diebitsch, might save Peary's frozen feet—save what could even prove to be life itself.

And, favorable to success of this urgent flight south were several important items: food in plenty, dogs full fed and rested, and that merciless gale at their backs. Nonetheless, no chain can be stronger than its weakest link; in this case, Hensen's stamina. For the ensuing labor, the coming battle against terrific odds to maintain the requisite speed, was entirely up to Hensen. Peary could not walk a step.

IN POINT of fact, all this is Hensen's story, each incredible superhuman mile of it. The details are unnecessary to recount. Recall what was encountered on the trip north to Conger. Use the imagination. Cannot the tale be thus supplied: the prodigious feats of strength, skill and endurance, this man of the hour accomplished alone, by sheer guts.

It is necessary only to point out that he reached the *Windward* reeling on his kamicks—in time. And to report that his chief lost only the soles of both feet and most of his toes.

Later, when asked about this frenzied flight south, Hensen's sole comment, characteristically modest, furnishes a magnificent bit of understatement.

"Oh, yes, it was tough, but it had to be done."

It is interesting to speculate whether, if Peary's companion at this time had been other than this halfcaste Peruvian, he of the superb physique, thorough training, and matchless devotion, Peary would on that world famous 8th of April, ten years later, have achieved his goal and stood at Ninety North.

(Continued from page 91)

spine, but it splintered almost immediately.

"We go on with the execution!" Wang commanded.

There came another pistol shot, less distant. It was followed by a single, sharp cry of pain.

"The shooting, quickly!" Wang snapped. "We must depart."

Tate choked back an involuntary sob. The Japanese rifle barrels pointed at him with a deadly finality. He felt Quinto's strong fingers gripping his arm, supporting him.

"Put them guns down!" a voice drawled, close at hand, in English.

Tate raced his eyes around in astonishment.

At the far end of the coach he saw the lean figure of Nevada. It was like a mirage. The cowboy's hands rested easily on the butts of holstered pistols. Ranged behind him were four grinning Chinese soldiers, arms piled high with hand-grenades.

A *Min-t'uan* man moved ever so slightly, raising his rifle barrel. Tate sucked his breath in. He wanted to scream out a warning.

A terrific blast thundered forth. Nevada's hands had been brown blurs as he palmed guns that thundered almost before they even left their holsters. His smooth, swift draw had been too fast for the eye to see. The *Min-t'uan* man's rifle kicked into the air while the man somersaulted backward.

Cornered, Wang grabbed for his own automatic. He hardly got his finger into the trigger guard when the gun spun off at a tangent. The crafty banker screamed with pain and doubled up, clutching a bleeding, shattered wrist.

Abruptly, the *Min-t'uan* and Japanese began firing indiscriminately at Nevada, at the camouflaged coach, at Quinto and at two innocent scone-shaped hills to the right. Virtue vanished below her windowsill and re-appeared with a dainty pearl-handled automatic. She fired methodically and gracefully at the Japanese.

Tate crashed to the ground. He saw Quinto land at his side. A bullet ricochetted, whining off the iron wheel of the car, plunking into the earth between them.

"Grenades!" shouted Quinto. "Head down!"

Tate flattened himself. Suddenly there came a brilliant flare . . . an explosion. Weeds along the trackbed were swept flat by the concussion. Chunks of metal hissed a bare foot above the ground and peppered the side of the coach.

One explosion followed another. Parts of the Japanese-*Min-t'uan* firing squad flew in various directions. A battered, slightly gory arm with no body or shoulder attached to it slid past Tate and lodged against the railroad track. Tate gulped sickeningly.

It was at least ten minutes before the noise subsided and the curtains of acrid powder smoke drifted aside. When this had occurred, it was revealed that there were only four *Min-t'uan* men, two in battered condition, and Wang left. The Japanese had been annihilated.

Nevada holstered his smoking guns and joined Quinto. "What are you doing here?" Quinto asked, thankfully.

"Prisoner," Nevada drawled. He explained his position briefly.

"That was wonderful, absolutely wonderful," Tate put in. He reached for the cowboy's hand, pumping it as though Nevada were a long lost brother. Then he beamed at Quinto, saying: "Hah, we've got Wang now."

Quinto nodded and smiled appreciatively as Mountain of Virtue attached herself to his arm. "We'll turn the remaining *Min-t'uan* over to the nearest town constabulary. They'll readily accept the prisoners, hearing that Teng Fa will be glad to see them."

"And Wang?"

"He goes to Lingtung with us. Teng Fa wants him personally. He does not always gets traitorous leaders of a receipt ring."

"And the murderer of Firth and Harrow," added Tate.

"No, not quite."

"What?" Tate looked surprised.

Quinto waved the question away. He turned toward Nevada.

"I am sorry, Nevada," he said. "I'm putting you under arrest. I must make sure you return to Lingtung!"

A MOUNTING nervous tension wavered in dissonant confusion and tightened upon the Lingtung Gardens behind a facade of noise. Firecrackers exploded from morning until night while drums and tambourines set up a constant din. The guerrilla students were celebrating the newly won victory of the Chinese Armies at Tai Erh Chwang on the Grand Canal Front.

Early in the morning, after having spent a wild night riding in a borrowed military truck, the party from the Loess Lands had returned. Quinto had immediately locked himself in the *yamen* with Virtue. For three hours there had been a furious pounding at a typewriter. A few minutes later, Virtue went with a score of Chinese guerrilleros into the Little Garden Theater. They remained locked up there.

In the afternoon, Quinto had called Tate into the *yamen*. "Events have arranged themselves nicely," G. H. Q. announced. "Tonight all things come together and we will bury the ghosts of Señores Firth and Harrow."

"Who is it?" he asked. "Nevada or Wang, or both?"

Quinto made a little motion with his hands, appealing for patience. "In China one never points out a truth. It is merely suggested. For a week now, we have been under a tension. Virtue and Miss Woodford were kidnapped. Three men were killed. It has been very hard. . . .

"Tonight we'll be entertained. We'll rest. My guerrilleros are giving a play, directed by Virtue. It will serve to take the edge of our nerves . . . will you tell Sergeant Sun that no one is to leave the gardens. Especially Wang and both Wiers. Secondly, everyone must attend the Little Garden Theater exactly at seven o'clock."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PLAY'S THE THING

AT SEVEN o'clock exactly, Tate went with Doc McKay to the tiny theater. They sat down at a small table and a guerrilla student brought two pots of tea and a bowl of sunflower seeds. The little theater was being run in the Chinese style where people sit at tables, eat, drink and talk while a play goes on.

Tate glanced around. At a table close to the stage sat the Governors of Sianfu —Civil and Military. With them were the Mayor of Lingtung and Mildred Woodford. Mildred chatted a mile a minute, in English. Mignon Chauvet, sallow-cheeked and weary from lack of sleep, occupied a table behind the mayor. She sat almost rigidly.

Farther back and near the left wall of the theater were Papa Wier, Mary and Nevada. The old missionary was white and trembling. His eyes had a harried look. Mary was turned to face Nevada. The two were whispering.

Tate's eyes swiveled around until they rested on Mr. Ho, the scholar. The old man sat complacently. He rolled walnuts in his right hand to keep his fingers supple for writing characters.

Behind Ho stood Teng Fa, resplendent in an olive green uniform with a couple of patches in the trouser seat. Lined up against the wall, tied to stools and deprived of tea and melon seeds, were Wang, four *Min-t'uan* prisoners and Colonel Nohuri, a short man with high cheekbones and very thick glasses.

"Looks like a quorum," McKay said, grinning.

A moment later Mountain of Virtue entered, her arm in Lieutenant Chi's.

Lieutenant Chi also could have put something to shame. In honor of the Tai Erh Chwang victory, he wore his full dress uniform. On one lapel was pinned a CIO Transport Workers' button which had somehow gotten into China.

Sergeant Sun hurried through the beer hall arrangement of tables to the stage where he busily spread out an assortment of objects on a small desk. The evidence, thought Tate. He recognized the objects: a derringer pistol, a dried bit of red clay, a capsule of heroin, scattered envelopes probably containing chits, time schedules and other data. The sergeant then went about the bare, projecting platform stage lighting oil lamps which flickered with the draft.

Suddenly a string of firecrackers exploded, dancing upon the stage. The theater filled with powder smoke.

"Hallo, Tate!" a voice spoke at his side and the calligraphist looked up, somewhat startled. He saw the huge figure of Sir Oliver Quist.

The ambassador eased himself upon a stool beside McKay. "Really, I thought I'd be late," he remarked.

Tate smiled pleasantly and started to introduce McKay when a terrific roll of drums reverberated in the theater. Almost immediately, Quinto walked out on the stage. In the dramatic light he looked picaresque, Gargantuan and very Mexican. His cotton clothes hung on his huge body like a circus tent.

"*Compañeros y compañeras,*" he began. "Tonight Teng Fa will make an arrest—the murderer of Clive Firth! But before such an arrest is made I am going to show you why." He paused effectively. "For a week Gimiendo Quinto has been a detective. Today I am a playwright.

"My guerrilleros will give a play about murder. It is in the form of the Chinese theater with the usual pantomime and gestures. . . . I shall merely add a few necessary details and suggest who among us is a murderer!"

G. H. Q. stepped back while a new string of firecrackers exploded. His dark eyes again brushed over the audience and paused momentarily on Sir Oliver Quist who, by this time, had seen Mountain of Virtue. A queer expression darkened the ambassador's broad face. He looked like a man who had just discovered he has been playing with loaded dice.

Suddenly a group of Quinto's guerrilleros raced into view, staging a magnificent battle in the style of Yang Hsiao-lou, the famous Pekin military actor. They tumbled, gyrated, somersaulted and wielded broad swords with fantastic enthusiasm. Then they all fell dead in assorted poses.

Presently, a guerrillero, dressed as an Invader officer, entered the battlefield and stole large placards marked *Bank Receipts* from the fallen heroes. From the opposite side of the stage two equally sinister figures entered. One wore a yellow trench coat. The other was a primly garbed foreign-style officer with an elaborate mustache. He had three noisy alarm clocks fastened to his wrists. The two sinister men shock hands with the Invader officer and all three turned to the business of stealing cardboard placards. As the scene ended, the dead Chinese heroes arose, turned their pockets inside out to prove they had been robbed.

Quinto bowed to his actors as they withdrew. The audience, whose first reaction of surprise had by now changed to eager watchfulness, listened.

"That," said the Mexican, "was only the first scene, the Wang-Nohuri receipt ring in action. The receipt ring was the complicating factor in our crimes at Lingtung Pavilions. For a year certain traitors to China as well as the Invaders have made themselves rich by robbing Chinese bodies. The ring was very large. Teng Fa will perhaps arrest a hundred people who were members."

Quinto paused for a second, glancing across the theater toward Wang who glared back with impotent venom.

"Its operation was very simple and I must give Señor Tate credit for helping me here. In Invader territory, Bank of China receipts were taken from the dead and wounded and sent to Wang who cashed them. He was in excellent position, being a member of the Sianfu branch of the bank. He could handle hundreds of receipts without arousing suspicion. Meanwhile, behind Chinese lines, men such as Señor Abe Harrow and Yellow Coat, acting as Ambulance Corps men, were in excellent position to extract more receipts from wounded and dead men. They also cashed them through Wang.

"Now, a few days before Harrow died, he was sent by Wang to Pan Tao to pick up a shipment of receipts from an Invader agent who penetrated our lines. The Nohuri cipher which Tate solved gave me this answer. Upon Señor Abe's return to Lingtung, a meeting in the cave on the mountain was called. There, Harrow was to have handed the new receipts to Wang and Wang was to have divided the spoils from the last cashing of receipts. I gathered much of this information from Wang's ledgers.

"This meeting didn't materialize be-

cause a very strange thing happened on the cliff above the cave . . . *Mira* . . ." Quinto waved his hand toward the stage and stepped aside.

A chair had been placed in the left quarter of the stage, for chairs and tables, in the Chinese theater, are normal symbols of mountain tops and cliffs. This one was a cliff. Ten feet to the right a guerrillero stood with his back to the audience. He supported a sandwich-board to show that he was a cave.

Presently, Harrow, still decked out with alarm clocks, marched toward the chair, lifting his knees high at each step in the accepted gesture for mountain climbing. He passed the cave and mounted the chair, then stood, staring down at an imaginary, beautiful Wei Ho Valley. Suddenly a grinning guerrillero scurried around the rear of the stage on his hands and knees, tooting and whistling as he went. He was the Lunghai Express.

Harrow took his coat off and slung it over his arm. Then, for the benefit of the audience in the Little Theater, he set each alarm clock at a distinct time. Almost in the same instant, another prancing guerrillero actor leaped across the stage, puffing mightily to indicate that he was a South Wind. He blew, huffed and puffed at the Harrow figure, finally blowing the latter off the chair and down the imaginary mountain cliff. A moment later the Lunghai Express chugged close to the chair on his hands and knees.

A buzz of excitement ran through the Little Theater. Chairs scraped and tea pots tinkled. There were nervous coughs and sighs of relief.

Quinto raised his hand for silence. "You see," he commented, "Señor Abe Harrow wasn't murdered as we all imagined! While waiting for the hour of the receipt ring meeting, he wandered toward the cliff. He stood too close to the edge and a gust of wind threw him off balance. It was very windy that day, I recall. This is the only explanation."

"Say, Quinto!" Tate called out from his table. "What about those other footmarks on the cliff? Wang's?"

"Ah, the footprints," murmured Quinto glancing over his huge shoulder toward the stage again. "That comes in scene three."

AN ACTOR wearing a long black gown and carrying enormous bank ledgers under his arms marched toward the chair-cliff. It was Wang. He mounted the chair, stamped his heels upon it and looked over the cliff disappointedly. He stood there a moment, then returned toward the sandwich-board cave.

Suddenly he glimpsed a figure who wore red suspenders over a military uniform—Firth. The Firth figure was spying on two other strangers near the cave. The latter two were dressed in the manner of Mr. Yellow Coat and Papa Wier. They also wore red suspenders which are the usual theatrical badge of a foreigner.

At length and with much exaggerated stealth, the procession of Wier, Yellow Coat, Firth and Wang descended the mountain. Abruptly, an actor dressed in plus fours and two-tone golf shoes, leaped across the stage and followed the procession at a respectful distance.

Quinto's voice interrupted the acting. "Intrigue, eh?" he said. "Wang, Wier, Yellow Coat, Firth, Chi and, before them, Nevada on the mountain—yet Harrow is murdered by a gust of wind. How was I able to deduce this? Particularly when everyone had a very good motive for killing Harrow? It was very simple, *escucha*. . . .

"In checking up, I found that Harrow didn't leave the Pavilion Gardens until after 10:15 that morning. He was seen conversing with Mr. Yellow Coat near the gate and at another time, with Papa Wier who forged my name to a military pass for Harrow. It takes an hour and a half to reach the mountain cliff, so obviously Harrow didn't get there until after 11:45. He wore three watches which stopped at 11:18, 11:30 and 11:50—the time of death. Only one of these could have been nearly correct, that is, 11:50.

"So much for that." Quinto paused and looked about, eyes smoky and alert. His audience watched, fascinated, all aware that a closely woven web of evidence was piling up against someone. But whom?

"Now," continued the Mexican, "why do I attach so much importance to time elements and the affairs on the mountain? This, simply! At 11:50 no one but Harrow was near the cliff. It takes a half hour to walk up to the cave, another hour to the cliff. Returning it takes some thirty-five minutes to traverse the trail from cliff to cave and from fifty to sixty minutes to walk from the cliff to the pavilions.

"Nevada was on the mountain but he was back in the gardens in 12:30. If he had been on the cliff, he must have started down before 11:40. Harrow was still alive. Through Lieutenant Chi's evidence, and Firth, it is clear that Mr. Yellow Coat, Papa Wier, Firth and Chi were near the cave at noon and afterwards. They could not possibly have been near the cliff at 11:50 when Señor Abe died.

"As for Wang, I knew he was on the cliff because he left heel marks. He had seen Harrow go up earlier and he followed. But he didn't arrive at the cliff until well after mid-day. Chi had seen him pass the cave sometime before noon. It takes an hour to walk from cave to cliff. Wang, realizing that Harrow's footprints ended on the escarpment backtracked quickly. Then he saw Firth spying on Wier and Mr. Yellow Coat. Instantly, suspicion entered his mind. He thought Firth had pushed Harrow overboard and had taken the bank receipts Harrow was carrying.

"You see how simple it is, *compañeros*. Instead of two mysteries, we have but one—Firth. And also, it was this matter of Wang suspecting Firth of having the receipts which connected the two deaths. But Señor Clive Firth's murder had nothing to do with the receipt ring! There was yet another motive for his murder. . . ."

A tremor of intense interest ran through the Little Theater.

A reed chair was placed diagonally upon the stage. It was the actual chair in which Firth had been murdered. Nearby were a typewriter, a file cabinet, a small table with two glasses of whiskey on it. Two grinning guerrillero actors stood nearer Quinto. They represented the door of Firth's villa. On the opposite side of the stage another guerrillero was bent double, hands and feet planted on the floor in the accepted symbol for an air-raid shelter tunnel.

"The time is now midnight," Quinto announced. "It is Firth's room."

FIRTH, still wearing his uniform and red suspenders, crossed the stage and entered his room by way of the two door-guerrilleros. A moment later, a second actor wearing Mignon Chauvet's hospital uniform followed him. Both began waving their arms violently and eloquently, making the conventional gestures for a heated argument. Suddenly the *tan*, female impersonator departed.

Quinto watched the scene with satisfaction, then turned to the audience.

"You see," he said. "Señorita Chauvet argued with Clive Firth, but she didn't murder him. She was in love with him and she was willing to return to France and face a murder charge which did not exist in order to prove her love. How do I know she didn't murder Señor Clive? Ah! When we found his body, there were two glasses of whiskey on the table. Each had been sipped. Mignon does not drink. Evidently someone drank with Firth after she left the room. But who? Could it have been his wife!"

There was an intake of breath throughout the Little Theater. Amazed expressions crossed a dozen faces. Mignon Chauvet sat rigid, her eyes wide. Mary Wier paled slightly. Tate gasped and stared at McKay in bewilderment.

Quinto smiled all around. "The fact that Mary Wier was married to Clive Firth surprises you? It was a very important clue. Without it I could not have solved this mystery. Now, let us proceed logically. Firth was very rich. If he died, Señorita Wier would inherit his wealth for Clive made out a will in her favor. She had a fine motive for killing him. She didn't love him. Instead, she loved Nevada. . . .

"Now Firth was murdered between midnight, when Señorita Chauvet left him, and 12:30. But certain events oc-

curred which made deductions most complicated as you will see in this next scene which takes place between 12.30 and one o'clock. Firth is already dead."

On stage, the Firth actor sat stiffly in the reed chair. Some red soya bean oil had been spilled on his chest. Papa Wier, still with his red suspenders, approached the door and entered. An elaborate, shocked expression crossed his features and he began staggering about upon seeing the dead man in the chair. Suddenly he picked up a derringer pistol from the floor.

A new guerrillero, announced as Mary Wier and wearing something which resembled a ballet skirt, entered upon the scene with mincing steps. She took the part of what is known on the Chinese stage as *ching-i*, that is, an honest girl. Promptly setting to the business of dropping enormous paper tears on the stage, the girl and her father then took the gun, left the room and hid the weapon under the stomach of the air-raid shelter. As they went off-stage Quinto resumed his commentary.

"The night of Firth's death," he said, "I had Mountain of Virtue entertain a number of men. The entertainment lasted until two o'clock. Though Papa Wier was there, he left earlier. He was a member of the receipt ring and under the control of Wang who supplied him with heroin. The use of heroin to undermine and control people is an old trick in China. The Invaders have used it with success against many Chinese officials.

"Wang realized he was being watched so he sent Papa Wier to Firth's room to steal the bank receipts which he thought Señor Clive had. Instead, Papa Wier found Firth dead! Then Mary, who had also come to see Firth, perhaps to beg for a divorce so that she could marry Nevada, found her father with the gun. She thought he had murdered Clive. To protect him, she hid the murder gun in the air-raid *refugio*. But she didn't notice an important clue—the heroin capsule her father dropped.

"You are perhaps wondering why I say Señor Clive was already dead when the Wiers entered? *Escucha*. I have two reasons for making them innocent of murder. *Primero*, neither papa nor daughter drink whiskey, which means someone else who drinks, visited with Firth. *Segundo*. It was Mary Wier and not Nevada who was shot at during the Invader air-raid the following afternoon. I will come to this later. But now the play. . . ."

Quinto's eyes sparkled brightly as he glanced toward the stage. "It is still the same scene, but much later, perhaps after 2:30 in the morning," he announced.

THE figure of Wang crossed the stage and entered Firth's quarters by the two-guerrillero doorway. He looked surprised upon seeing Firth dead. Then he stopped to smell the two glasses of whiskey and turned his nose up in an elaborate gesture.

Finally, and this very methodically, he turned the typewriter over, emptied the file cabinet, scattered papers all over the stage. In his last gesture, he took a chunk of clay from his shoe and deposited it carefully on the floor.

Quinto took up the thread of the story once more.

"After the poetry recitation in the garden, Wang was surprised that Papa Wier didn't report back to him," he explained. "So, upon leaving Virtue, Wang went to Firth's room and searched for the receipts. He left a clue consisting of a bit of red clay which had stuck to his shoe when he had looked over the cliff where Harrow had died. It was this bit of evidence which seemed to connect the two deaths and made them appear part of the same plot. But Wang didn't murder Firth. Wang also doesn't drink. When the Wiers were in the room it hadn't been ransacked, but Firth was dead. We have Virtue's word that Wang was with her until after 2:30, so it was Wang who came in later. No other visitors seemed to have come in after that time. Mr. Ho had opium to alibi for him. Doctor McKay and Chi furnished mutual alibis.

"There are still a few bits of evidence which must fit in. Who left a tiny shred of burned cloth? Who drank whiskey with Firth between midnight and 12:30? Who did Firth know well enough to

admit to his room? Why was Firth calm in his last moment of danger?"

Quinto paused briefly, surveying his audience. A sharp edge slipped into the tone of his voice.

"Now that the receipt ring and its members are cleared and the ring no longer advances a motive for Firth's murder, was there anyone among us with another motive? Yes,—Señorita Woodford! She came to Lingtung under suspicion. John Tate had been assigned by Hankow to follow her. But where was she that night?"

Four Chinese guerrilleros appeared on the stage, rolling like cartwheels. One of them chugged in imitation of an automobile motor. Suddenly an outlandish creature with a long putty nose, a tweed dress and a corset tightly laced over the tweed, stepped into a space between the cartwheel guerrilleros. It was Lingtung's idea of Mildred. She was accompanied by a caricature of John Tate who sported the usual red suspenders and an arm wound with a few score yards of linen bandage.

"Now," explained Quinto. "Señorita Woodford was drinking in Sianfu, but she was still a very good suspect. She had the one motive we were looking for. Mildred Woodford was not a suspicious journalist. She is an artist. She was Clive Firth's cousin, the former Lady Goodwin!"

"Dash it, Quinto! You can't thumb this on me. I was in Sianfu!" Mildred Woodford screamed.

Quinto leaned forward, a triumphant iciness flashing in his eyes. "You are Lady Goodwin, eh?" he snapped.

"I am not."

A booming voice from the back of the theater seemed to smash Mildred down. It was Sir Oliver Quist's. "She's Lady Goodwin. Damme, she hasn't changed a bit."

Mildred swung around, got one good look at the ambassador standing next to Tate, then sank back, sheet-white.

"Now," said Quinto, "I'll explain why I knew you were not a journalist with pro-Invader leanings and that you had another reason for being in Lingtung. You'll listen quietly, eh? Then Teng Fa will do the arresting.

"First, I'll give you a motive. You knew that Señor Clive's father, Lord Firth, died many months ago. You knew Clive was in China. You two were the only living members of the Firth family. If young Clive were to die, naturally you would inherit the greater part of the Firth fortune. Now where can one die without arousing suspicion? In a war? Yes. So, dear Señorita, you came to China to see that your cousin died. Of course you took a new name—Woodford. You became a journalist with slight enemy leanings. No one would suspect an enemy agent was related to Clive Firth.

"How did I know you were Lady Goodwin? Hah, *muy claro*. When you sent telegrams to the New York and London *Times* you addressed them to New York and London. You should have sent them to their offices in Hankow or Shanghai. A good journalist would have. My next clue needed imagination. In your diary you drew a picture of Nevada in a modernistic, cubist style. The Lady Goodwin mentioned in Clive Firth's will which he sent to Sir Oliver Quist, had once been a student of Picasso—a cubist.

"The fact that Mary Wier and Nevada were shot at during the air-raid, and the discovery of Clive's will in which Mary was made principal heir, added to this proof. But now, in the next and last scene of our play, you'll see how Clive was murdered."

QUINTO swept his eyes over the audience and the result was a responsive ripple of excitement.

Again, Quinto smiled. "Many of you imagine that Señorita Woodford murdered Firth," he said. "Ah, but you are wrong! She *was* in Sianfu that entire night. Only now do I reveal the true murderer, the visitor in Firth's villa between midnight and 12:30."

A burst of firecrackers danced across the stage. The reed chair re-appeared, the file cabinet, the typewriter, the two-guerrillero doorway, then Firth. He exercised and did a handstand to show his good health.

A moment later, the actor representing John Tate entered the doorway,

pointed vehemently at his bandaged right arm. Both he and Firth drank from the two whiskey glasses with much formality before Firth sat in the reed chair. Once again, the Tate actor grinned at the audience as he pointed at his bandaged arm then, suddenly, a gun exploded from within the bandage. Firth stiffened, toppled over on the stage to indicate death, then got up and sat in the chair.

Tate immediately went to the file cabinet and after a moment of searching, pulled out a huge sheet of paper marked *Will*. Finally, he slit the bandages on his arm with a knife, drew forth the hidden derringer pistol and dropped it on the stage.

The incredulous stillness which had gripped the Little Theater during the scene abruptly terminated with the crash of a table and the cascading din of breaking pottery.

Heads and bodies swerved, eyes leaping to the rear of the theater toward the table which McKay, Sir Oliver and Tate had occupied. That corner of the hall was in an uproar. McKay and the ambassador were on their feet. Tate was flat on his back upon the floor beside the overturned table.

"Good Lord!" cried McKay, "He's fainted!"

The ambassador lifted Tate to his feet, then dropped him on a chair. After a moment, the latter opened his albino eyes and blinked miserably. "I knew t-t-this w-w-would—" he began weakly.

"Go on, Quinto," the ambassador called.

Quinto smiled a bit sadly, reached into his pocket for tobacco and rolled himself a cigarette, waiting. . . . Not until there was absolute silence did he speak.

"*Pues, compañeros y camadaras*, you understand, it was not Señorita Woodford but John Tate who actually murdered Firth. But the Señorita and Tate were working together. As I said, they had the best motive—the Firth fortune. You wish to hear how I knew it was Tate, eh?

"*Bueno*, from the beginning. When Woodford came to China in her disguise as a journalist, she met Tate in Hankow. Tate arranged that the Ministry of Information should order him to guard her. They came to Lingtung with no pre-arranged plan for murdering Firth. Much depended on the situation and whether Woodford would meet her cousin and be recognized.

"Arriving in Lingtung they discovered that Harrow was dead. It seemed to be murder. It was very appropriate for they could make it appear that the second crime was connected with the first.

"Yes, this fact even bewildered me. I imagined the two deaths were related and that the relation was one of motive; in other words, that the same person had committed both crimes, or that both crimes were committed because of the same motive. The only real connection is that the second crime hid behind the skirts of the first, eh? But why did I eventually suspect Tate and Mildred Woodford?"

Quinto paused, sucked in smoke from his cigarette and let it curl out through his nostrils.

"When Señor Clive was found murdered, there were certain clues other than those I have already presented. There was this bit of burned cloth." Quinto exhibited an envelope containing the bit. "There was whiskey on the table indicating that Firth and his assassin were on friendly enough terms to have a drink. There was the fact that Nevada was shot at during the air-raid. But most important, there was the derringer gun and the expression of calm on Firth's face when he died.

"Why was Firth's face calm? Was it because he knew the person who threatened him and felt he wouldn't be shot? No. It was this that aroused my interest. Then I realized the derringer is a small gun, designed to be hidden. Señor Clive didn't know he was in danger. He didn't see the gun. It was wrapped within Tate's bandages. Yes, *seguro*, Tate's arm was broken, but Señor Doctor McKay will point out the fact that Tate still had enough control of his fingers to pull a trigger. . . ."

Quinto's smoky eyes jumped across the theater to catch McKay's nod of agreement.

(Continued on page 120)

DO WE HAVE TO DIE?

A strange man in Los Angeles, known as "The Voice of Two Worlds," reveals the story of a remarkable system that often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, achievement of brilliant business and professional success and new happiness. Many report improvement in health. Others tell of increased bodily strength, magnetic personality, courage and poise.

The man, a well-known explorer and geographer, tells how he found these strange methods in far-off and mysterious Tibet, often called the land of miracles by the few travelers permitted to visit it. He discloses how he learned rare wisdom and long-hidden practices, closely guarded for three thousand years by the sages, which enabled many to perform amazing feats. He maintains that these immense powers are latent in all of us, and that methods for using them are now simplified so that they can be used by almost any person with ordinary intelligence.

He maintains that man, instead of being limited by a one-man-power mind, has within him the mind-power of a thousand men or more as well as the energy-power of the universe which can be used in his daily affairs. He states that this sleeping giant of mind-power, when awakened, can make man capable of surprising accomplishments, from the prolonging of youth, to success in many fields. To that eternal question, "Do we have to die?" his answer is astounding.

The author states the time has come for this long-hidden system to be disclosed to the Western world, and offers to send his amazing 9,000-word treatise—which reveals many startling results—to sincere readers of this publication, free of cost or obligation. For your free copy, address the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. 176E, Los Angeles, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free treatises have been printed.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

AND artists, too, we hasten to add. The men who illustrate our magazine are as important factors as any in making *Adventure* what it is, and as loyal to it as any member of our Authors' or Readers' Brigade. For instance: I. H. Hazelton, who writes—

> I got a great kick out of doing the decorative border and tail-piece for "The Guns of the Keokuk" for Miss Hyer's stirring ballad recalled a phase of my father's Civil War service and some of the yarns with which he used to regale us kids. He graduated from Harvard Medical School in the Class of '61 and immediately entered the regular Navy. (Resigned after five years as Passed Assistant Surgeon.)
>
> Most of his service was with the blockading squadron and he was stationed off Charleston for a year or two. I believe he was attached to the *Ohio*, the *Vandalia*, and later to the little gun-boat, *Paul Jones*, at various times. I don't know if Father saw the *Keokuk's* Dahlgrens being snatched—apparently none of us damyankees did—but if he'd been alert he could have. He was there.

WE ARE doubly indebted to Mr. Hazelton this month for he it was who put us in touch with Stanley Dodge of Isle au Haut, Maine, the first man to report the arrival of the President's yacht and her escorting squadron to Maine waters after the historic meeting with Churchill on the high seas, when the whole world was wondering as to the President's whereabouts. "Maine Man" by Burroughs Mitchell, based on this historic episode, becomes still more interesting in the light of the footnote which follows. It is an account of Dodge's exciting discovery which appeared in Stonington, Maine's *Island Ad-Vantages*.

> For the second time in six years President Roosevelt pointed the nose of his ship into the waters of Penobscot Bay. This time he was aboard the Presidential Yacht *Potomac*.
>
> The first news of this event was brought to our office by Stanley Dodge who reported that a large flotilla of warships was off Isle au Haut, Thursday morning, [Aug. 14]. During the course of the day A. Cressy Morrison had a fishing party out, and one of his guests recognized the *Potomac* with the Presidential flag at the main, and the escort vessel, the *Calypso*, both anchored near the eastern end of the Gut passage. Two Navy amphibian planes were in the air above, and later a Navy land plane flew over.
>
> The party, shortly after, sighted the heavy ships of the naval escort about five miles off Northeast Harbor, these consisting of three cruisers, apparently of the *Tuscaloosa* class, and outside of these, in a wide semicircle, five destroyers were maintaining a slow patrol.
>
> During the course of the early afternoon the *Potomac* and the *Calypso* anchored at the beginning of Eggemoggin Reach off Sunshine, and could be plainly seen from the home of Gus Heanssler. Ira Nevells brought the news to Barter's wharf at Stonington, and Steve McDonald relayed it to this office.
>
> The warships with the President made a continuous line out to sea. First there was the *Potomac*, with the *Calypso* anchored astern in Eggemoggin Reach. Then came the *Tuscaloosa*, with two smaller cruisers anchored farther out.

THE author of "Maine Man" writes—

> While I'm not a Maine native, I know something about the celebrated state because my people came from there and I spent four pleasant years at Bowdoin College. Since graduation from Bowdoin, I've been in New York, working at newspaper syndicate jobs and manuscript reading for a publishing house.

(Continued on page 116)

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A Correspondence Institution

(Continued from page 114)

The story, we thought, besides being an entertaining piece of fiction was far and away the most effective Navy recruiting plea we've encountered lately. F. D. R., a Navy enthusiast himself, to put it mildly, would enjoy the yarn.

AND speaking of the Navy, we got a warm glow of pleasure on spotting an article called "English and American Short Stories of the Sea" in the July 1941 issue of the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, a semi-official magazine published at Annapolis. Lieutenant Commander P. S. Lincoln, U. S. Naval Reserve (Retired), the author of the piece, speaking of Talbot Mundy's Tros of Samothrace stories says—"the galley and small-boat handling in storm and action could hardly be more vividly and accurately described, for Mundy writes like an inspired eyewitness." He goes on to praise Arthur D. Howden Smith's *Swain* saga, and his *Porto Bello Gold*, which we published in 1924. Of the latter Lieutenant Commander Lincoln says—"it is worthy of Stevenson in its seamanship and description of storm and action at sea." In conclusion the author says—

> *Adventure* and the *Saturday Evening Post* may not rank high with the *soi-disant* intelligentsia, but hardly an issue of either lacks a well-written story of the sea. Both magazines have been nurseries of successful writers, and no anthology of sea stories would be complete that neglected to look through their issues and list the many writers whose stories have appeared in them, even though many of them have not been printed in book form.

Them's mighty kind words, Commander, for all concerned, and we appreciate 'em. Don't think we don't!

LAST month in *Camp-Fire* we promised to give any amateur cryptographers who had been reading "Viva China!" the breakdown of the cipher that Tate solved so featly for G.H.Q. Here's how he explained it modestly to Mountain of Virtue.

(Continued on page 118)

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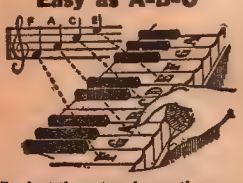

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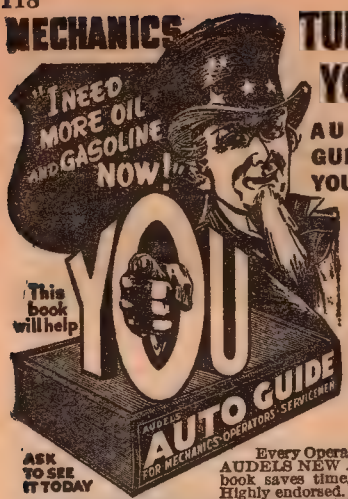

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(Continued from page 116)

The Original Cipher

3-15-38
SURFK DLQUH PLVHU HFHWW HVQXP HURVH 1940D 5602V
HUD28 PDUVP DLVRQ WDQJS DQWDR SDLHP HQWSR XUVRO
GHGHW RXWFR PSWHV XUGHU QLHUS DTXHW GRLWH WUHUH
QGXQR WUHDJ HQWPH PHWHP SFROQ RKXUL XVYXH YVXHV

The Solution in French

Prochain remise recettes numeraté 1940 à 5620 sera 28 Mars Maison Tang Pan Tao paièment pour solde de tout compte sur dernier paquet doit être rendu notre agent même temp—Col. Nohuri.

Tate's Explanation

"It's a rather simple one. At first I suspected it was made in *pai hua,* the new alphabetical Chinese, but it didn't make sense. I tried frequency tests again in German, English and Russian. No luck. Finally I had an inspiration. I noticed the date on the cipher. Arabic numerals — 3-15-38, in other words, March fifteenth. Do you know what happened that day? Caesar was murdered!"

"Caesar?"

"Yes. The Ides of March."

"But this is China," Virtue protested.

"Oh, the date had nothing to do with the cipher, at least Caesar's date, but it gave me an idea. I puzzled with the cipher in Latin for a while, then I remembered—Julius Caesar used ciphers for Roman military dispatches. There is a certain cipher form bearing his name. An extension type in which you extend the alphabet backward or forward from the letters in the cipher. This one is a four-letter cipher. Look at my third page, the work sheet. The top line is the solution, the bottom line is the code. The alphabet was just extended four times to make a code, then the words were broken into five-letter units to cause confusion. Ten meaningless letters were thrown in at the end for the same reason."

Virtue took the sheet indicated, reading the first part of the solution:

Proch ainre miser ecett esnum erot! 1940a
qspdi bj os
rtqej ckpt
SURFK DLQUH PLVHU HFHVV HVQXP HURVH 1940D

"It seems the code writers had difficulty extending numerals so they were left as is. It added to the confusion," said Tate.

"Viva China!" will appear shortly in book form under the Morrow imprint. "Murder, Chop Chop" will be its new title—K.S.W.

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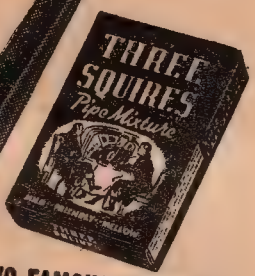

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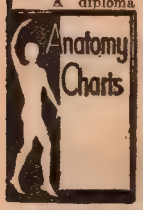

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(Continued from page 112)

"THE derringer leads with irresistible logic to another point. The following day during the air-raid, Nevada was wounded by the same gun. Why? I was puzzled. There seemed to be no reason. But consider, the derringer is inaccurate at distances of more than fifteen feet, so was it aimed at Nevada? This point remained a mystery until I saw Firth's will. Mary Wier was named heir. She had stood beside Nevada and it was she whom the bullet was aimed at.

"But what fact does this lead to? Ah, *una cosa clara.* The murderer also knew that Mary was in the will. Mary had to die also if Lady Goodwin were to receive the Firth fortune. Naturally, the murderer must have seen Señor Clive's will. But the will was in the mail and didn't arive in Hankow until a few days ago. *Bueno.* The murderer had seen a carbon copy of the will. He had taken it, in fact, from Clive's file the night of the murder, but he forgot that in Lingtung carbon copies leave traces that carbon copies have been made. Since the beginning of the war our carbon paper has been crudely made. It has carbon on both faces so that when a copy is made, it leaves an imprint on the copy and also a reverse imprint on the back of the original paper.

"Now, I see that some of you are worried. Wasn't Tate in Sianfu with Señorita Woodford? *Es verdad.* That night he even called me to assure me he was there. But remember, they drove there alone. Sianfu is but a ten to fifteen minute drive by fast car. A man can drive with one hand.

"He climbed over the south wall. His clothes were soiled and dirty the next day. He visited Firth whom he had met earlier. Then, after shooting Firth, he went through his files to make sure there were no traces of Lady Goodwin there. He found the will. He left everything very neat. Fearing a possible search in Sianfu by military police, he cut enough of the bandage to take out the gun. It was much safer to leave it in Lingtung.

"But there was one clue—the shred of burned cloth! When the gun fired

through the bandage it cut or burned off a tiny bit. When Tate returned to Sianfu he and Señorita Woodford undid the bandage on his arm and replaced it with fresh gauze. They made the mistake of throwing the bullet riddled bandage where it would clog up the Guest House plumbing. Teng Fa has saved me this evidence."

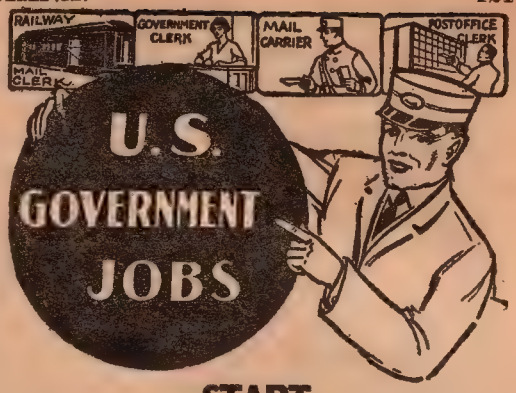
There was a gasp from the audience as Quinto stepped back to the table on the stage and lifted a long, rumpled strip of bandage. It had been torn and burned in two or three places.

"Now," continued Quinto. "Tate and Woodford had already seen the copy of Clive's will. Since no original had been found in his file, they realized it must have been sent off. The only thing to do was to murder Mary Wier. The opportunity came during the air-raid when Tate again found the derringer in the *refugio* where Mary had thrown it. Tate made me a list of where people stood in the *refugio* tunnel when Nevada was wounded. Mr. Ho and Wang were placed at the west entrance, McKay and Mignon at the other. I could see no motive for any of these four shooting at Nevada or Mary. Then I realized Tate had rearranged the list so as to hide himself. He was at the east entrance himself."

"But why did he do this for Miss Woodford?" Lieutenant Chi suddenly asked.

"Ah," murmured Quinto. "That is the whole answer. I had a few clues which answer that. Once, when speaking of Firth's bravery and the fact that his face was calm even while threatened with death, Tate remarked, 'I doubt if I could sit by calmly while someone waved a gun at me, even if it were my wife or mother.' Only a married man would use the word 'wife' in such a manner. It wouldn't enter a single man's mind.

"Also, when I brought Señorita Woodford's clothes to my room after the incident of the bath, Tate recognized the dress. Previously, the Señorita had worn tweeds in Lingtung and while travelling. Only Sergeant Sun and I saw her wearing this new dress. So how did Tate recognize it? Perhaps while she was



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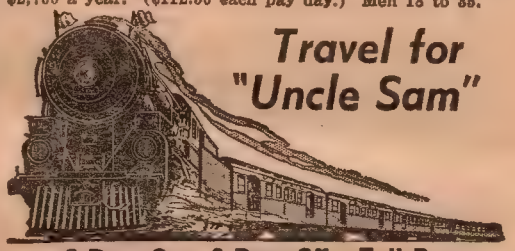

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packing a suitcase in Hangkow or in her room at the Guest House. Tate, of course, was and is married to Lady Goodwin. Sir Oliver will admit that she married an American. However, it is not very important. Perhaps Tate, the calligraphist, wished to separate from the lady. He had been in China very long. He needed money to continue his studies. So he took this chance. The two planned a clever crime. Had it not been that G. H. Q. was here, they would have had success, eh?"

CHAPTER XIX

THE GENERALISSIMO'S TEETH—VIVA CHINA

THE morning following Quinto's startling theatrical the Pavilion Gardens were bathed in golden sunlight and filled with the delicate odors of jasmine and camphor. There was still a great deal of noise for the celebration of Tai Erh Chwang had been so successful the guerrilleros had voted to keep it going another day.

Following breakfast, a long black sedan pulled up at the North Gate near Sergeant Sun's pink brick guardhouse. Five people got in the back of the car—Colonel Nohuri, Banker Wang, Papa Wier, John Tate and Mildred Woodford. Then Teng Fa, resplendent in his olive uniform, seated himself in the front beside the driver and the car roared away along the road to Sianfu.

As the sedan swung into the East-West Road, Teng Fa glanced over his shoulder at Mildred Woodford. The sight of her Yorkshire nose made him wince a little. Then, as if for relief, his thoughts turned to Mountain of Virtue.

"The one blind spot in my files," he murmured reflectively. "I must come back and find out how she always turns up three queens at poker. Could it be that she . . . ah. . . ."

In the rear seat, squeezed uncomfortably between Wang and Woodford, Tate looked out upon the sunny landscape as the car rolled along. There was a pained expression on his round face

and a certain bitterness evident in his watery eyes.

It had been Mildred's idea to wind the derringer in the bandage. She had thrown the bandage down the drain at the Guest House. She had drawn the cubist picture of Nevada.

LIEUTENANT CHI leaned over the billiard table in the *yamen* Pavilion. He looked very morose for a man whose army had just won a thumping victory at the Grand Canal Front. On the billiard table were spread a half dozen copies of the *St. Louis Baseball News*. Chi shook his head sadly and spoke to Doc McKay.

"Looks like a very bad season for the Dodgers," he said. "We'll be in the cellar again this year. What we need is a new manager."

McKay grinned, eyes twinkling from under tufted brows. "Yi, laddie, you should worry as much about the war as you do about baseball."

"But with China, I don't have to worry," replied Chi with utter confidence. "We'll win. We're only fighting the Japanese. With the Dodgers it's different; they're faced with Cincinnati and the Giants!"

Sergeant Sun appeared, grinning cockily from ear to ear as he hurried over and handed the doctor a pot containing a brilliant blue-flowered cineraria plant.

"Here chop chop new kind just grow you ask for Doc Meeki," said Sun.

"Thanks, laddie," replied McKay.

He suddenly recalled that it was Mountain of Virtue who had once suggested to him that a gift of flowers might make Mignon Chauvet happy.

OF ALL the citizens in the garden, Nevada was the most serious and practical on this particular morning. As he breakfasted alone with Mary, in the Wier villa, he tried to put things straight.

"Listen, Mary," he drawled, fitting his thoughts and words together carefully. "Teng Fa is gonna get the military

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court to be easy on your pa. He'll get him paroled to you. Quinto says I gotta leave China. He says we oughta go to Nevada and get us a ranch and take your pa. . . ."

As Nevada spoke, Mary fingered a tiny jade wedding ring on her finger—a gift from Virtue. There was a certain tenderness to her thoughts for she was thinking of how Quinto had arrested Nevada, brought him back to Lingtung and then had the Mayor of Lingtung perform the wedding just before the theatrical. Nevada had looked embarrassed and somewhat amazed, but he had said, "Yes."

With such thoughts in her mind, she stared at the lean cowboy. Absently, she raised her hand and felt the slight swelling on her jaw.

TOWARD noon a dazzling sun looked directly down upon the sawed-off crest of Running Wind Mountain. Its rays picked out two familiar figures walking arm in arm against the mild breeze that combed the mountain top. One figure was huge, and dressed in something pea green.

The second figure was strictly *hsiao-chieh*. It was Virtue, of course. She wore a jacket and trousers of jade-silk which constrasted prettily with the brightness of her lips and the wind-swirled blackness of her hair. There was a smile on her lips as she and Quinto came to a halt upon the mountain cliff.

For a moment, both stared down upon the Wei Ho Valley, seeing the spread of green, the rolling poppy beds, the orchards and the turquoise ribbon of river. Then Quinto sighed contentedly.

"There is just one little mystery I haven't solved," he murmured. "The Generalissimo's teeth!"

"The teeth? Oh!" Virtue smiled mysteriously.

"*Hola, chica,* I thought you knew something about those teeth," said Quinto. "You were in the *yamen* when they disappeared. So?"

"Lieutenant Chi holds them."

"Chi?"

"Yes. He took them." Virtue nodded

prettily. "He had a fine reason. The lieutenant is suspicious that there might be a trace of Japanese workmanship or material in them. He is a patriot also, and since it has been rumored about that the Generalissimo might want these particular teeth back, Chi stole them. He feels that with the present teeth which are all Chinese, the Generalissimo can bite better. It is very important for China's bite to be strong."

"When did you learn this?" asked Quinto.

"Oh, I saw Chi take them."

Virtue slipped a delicate hand in her pocket and brought forth a lotus pod. Breaking the pod she slipped a few seeds between her lips.

"I am thinking," said Quinto. "that since everything goes well at Lingtung again I must do something. I know what it will be. For a long time I've had the ambition to capture a Japanese Cabinet Minister."

Quinto smiled at the sound of his own words and he blinked gently upon the valley spreading below him. Suddenly, from the distance, came a half belligerent and somewhat carefree whistle. It was the Lunghai Express, clattering toward Lingtung. The camouflaged car was now securely coupled behind the engine to prevent it from going off on its own again.

A vaguely troubled look crossed Quinto's sunny face as he turned to Virtue. He suddenly remembered what the ambassador, Sir Oliver, had said about Nanking and about Mountain of Virtue.

His mouth opened a trifle as he stared at his strangely beautiful companion. He was on the point of asking her a question about Nanking. A very important question. It would have to be put delicately.

Then he found her staring back at him. Her lids drooped for an instant, dark lashes sweeping her golden cheeks with an air of bland innocence. She seemed to be reading his very thoughts for a smile curved her lips and she handed him a pod of lotus seeds.

"To enjoy their fragrance, Gimiendo," she said, "you must think of nothing, absolutely nothing."

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Stanley F. Wilde who was at Great Lakes in 1917 and 1918, later in medical corps in Brooklyn Hospital, and later foreman on U.S.S. *Bali*. Write an old friend. R. E. Gardner, 3258 North Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Am anxious to get in touch with several old friends who were with me in Cardina, Mex., in 1911:—Jack Yentor, Chas. Castle, John Conn, Johnny Welsh, Peon Jackson, Logan Teague. All were locomotive engineers with old Mexican Central Railway out of Cardenas S.L.P. Mexico, 1908 to 1912. Also, George Stevenson, last heard of as with Seaboard Airline Railway, Raleigh, N. C., in 1920.

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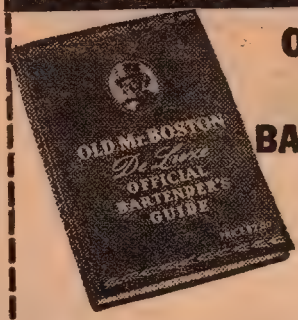

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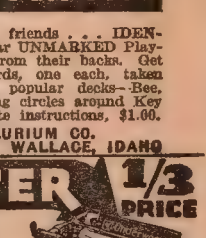

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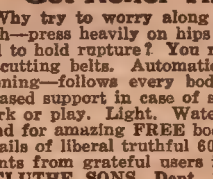

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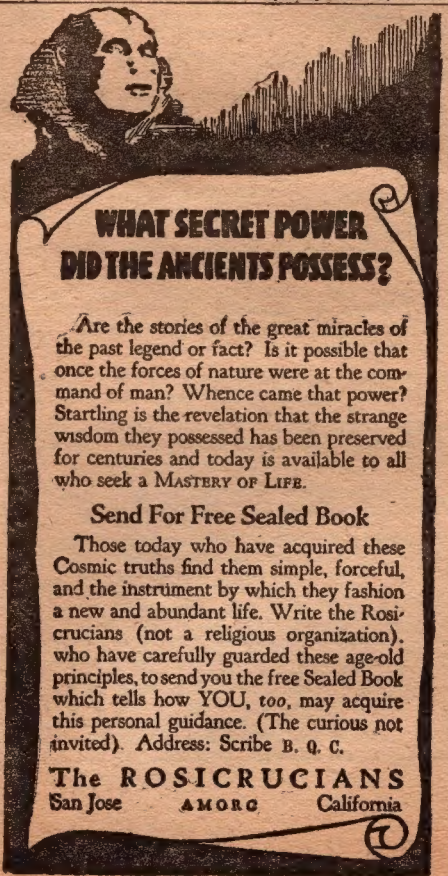

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